Special Issue

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The Strange Death of Soviet Communism

An Autopsy

Why Did It Happen?

Francis Fukuyama, Vladimir Kontorovich, Myron Rush,
Charles Fairbanks, Peter Reddaway, Stephen Sestanovich

Sins of the Scholars

Robert Conquest, Martin Malia, William Odom,
Richard Pipes, Peter Rutland

Western Intellectuals and Communism

Saul Bellow, Nathan Glazer, Irving Kristol

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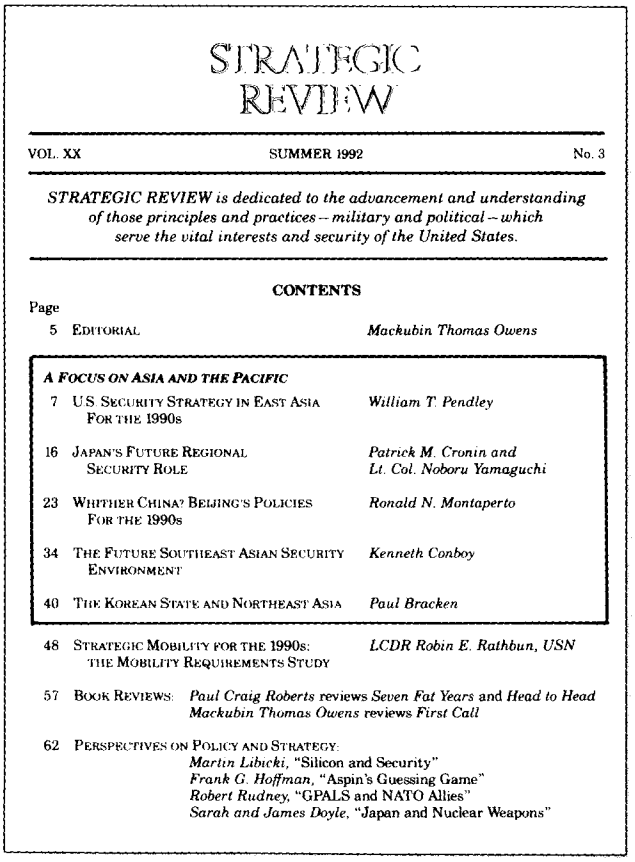

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THE NATIONAL INTEREST

NUMBER 31, Spring 1993

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A Special Issue

In our introduction to the first issue of *The National Interest*, in the fall of 1985, Robert Tucker and I confidently asserted that "the Soviet Union constitutes the single greatest threat to American interests, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future."

We were, of course, half-wrong. Along with virtually everyone else, we failed to anticipate that the first six years of *The National Interest* would also be the last six years of the Soviet Union. Despite this astonishing coincidence, we claim no causal connection.

As with all sudden deaths, that of Soviet communism raises questions: Was it a case of fatal disease, accident, suicide, or murder—or some unusual mixture of these? What is to be said for and against the various explanations on offer? When did death become inevitable? What part did Western policy play? Why did it take virtually everyone—and especially most of the supposed experts—by surprise? How, in retrospect, does the behavior of Western intellectuals stand up?

To discuss these questions, we bring together some of America's most distinguished historians, social scientists, and thinkers. In doing so, we wish to acknowledge the generous help of Professor Charles Fairbanks, Jr., who initiated the seminar series from which this symposium grew.

-Owen Harries

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Introduction

Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr.

THE VICTORIAN historian E.A. Freeman once wrote of his great precursor, the Greek historian Polybius,

> A man must have lived through a millennium in any other portion of the world's history, to have...[experienced] with his own eyes and his own ears [as much history as Polybius] acquired within the limits of an ordinary life.

Freeman meant by this that when Polybius was born, a few years before Carthage was decisively defeated by Rome, the world was dominated, as it had been for thousands of years, by contending states and cultures. Within the lifetime of Polybius, all this changed. We are today almost precisely in the position of Polybius. Since 1985 we have lived through a transformation of world politics that in analogous cases, like the decline of Rome or of the Ottoman Empire, took hundreds of years.

The collapse of communism marks the close of an era of world history. Because the onset of the Cold War, in 1947-50, roused again the instincts and the debates previously stirred by the rise of Hitler, it is actually since the year 1933 that our awareness has been shaped by this question: What kind of phenomenon do the fascist and communist states represent and how should we respond to them? There has been great debate about these questions, and even the movements that protested the hold of the Cold War on political life have themselves been shaped by it. For nearly sixty years this division between opposing social-political systems has conditioned the complex process by which political, social and intellectual attitudes develop.

In intellectual life, we must go back a considerable distance to find analogies to our new, post-communist situation. Since the seventeenth century, intellectuals in Western societies have lived in a peculiar relationship to the societies surrounding them, a relationship quite different from that of other cultures and periods. In the modern age intellectuals have tended to find their societies radically at fault in the light of principles that can be discovered by the mind but also can be adequately actualized on this earth by human effort. This relationship is what Lionel Trilling called the adversary culture. Such a relationship between the life of the mind and the existing social order has always presupposed the existence of an alternative worldview (an "ideology"), a vision of the superior social order, and a political movement that seeks it. All three were first provided by the eighteenth century enlightenment that made the American and French revolutions.

In our own times, fascism and then Marxism have been the homes of the adversary culture. For long periods, Western intellectuals were attracted by dictatorial regimes like Italy, the USSR, Germany, China, Cuba, or Nicaragua. Not today. But what the existence of the Soviet bloc regimes still brought to the Western debate was the sense that other modern political and social arrangements were possible, that we were not living in a Roman empire.

When communism finally perishes, there will be for the first time in about three hundred years no strong alternative worldview to that undergirding the existing insti-

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tutions, no vision of alternative political arrangements to sustain an adversary culture, and no strong ideologically driven movement to secure those arrangements. Our life both political and intellectual will proceed within an entirely new horizon. In the modern West it is probably only the weakening of absolute monarchy and of Christianity as political and social forces that can be compared to the collapse of communism. But the collapse of communism is happening very suddenly.

Although we have scarcely yet stepped into the post-communist era, we have already suffered one surprise after another. In world politics, we have been surprised by the "new world disorder," especially by the sudden rise of ethnic, tribal, and clan hatreds, dispensing with the old state structures (the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Canada) that once seemed needed precisely to adjust the relations between ethnic groups. In some places, from Somalia to the Russian Federation, the institutions of the modern state, which seemed a permanent fixture of our world, are breaking down or have simply collapsed. Western dithering over Bosnia shows we are fundamentally adrift in dealing with these circumstances.

The collapse of communism has confused many issues that seemed to be settled, at home as well as abroad. At the same time, it has created throughout the West an impatience with old answers. We may have renewed energy, but we also have far less sense of where we are headed. After the collapse of communism we need greater intellectual clarity, but it is harder to have it because the axioms that led us to foresee the continued survival of the Soviet system have been called into question without being replaced by anything else. Where to start in rethinking these questions?

PERHAPS THE best place to start is with the collapse of communism itself. What took place in the USSR during the last seventy years was, in the eyes of its proponents, a "great experiment" in the application of new modes of organization to social life, the largest such experiment in history. The experiment failed, and in failing it seems to have destroyed the laboratory. This way of looking at things can alert us to how much we can learn from the collapse of communism. We, like Polybius, have the fortune to be alive at one of the hinges of historical change, when the nature of things is unusually visible.

We belong to a culture that believes itself to be the most empirical in history. More than any previous civilization we try to draw our beliefs not from holy books or intuition or abstract reasoning but from experience, from what happens when ideas are tested in practice. What is true of our civilization as a whole in a vague sense is very precisely true of social science. Social science, like natural science, prides itself on its rigorous and progressive character: we change our ideas only because of evidence, but we do change them when the evidence contradicts our earlier hypotheses.

Given this perspective, it is very strange how little we have questioned our earlier beliefs in the light of the unexpected experience of communism's collapse. Only in the economic area has there been any major intellectual shift; we are less attracted to socialism and have more faith in the market. But the discussion remains within the limits set by the preexisting conventional wisdom. We have not begun to ask what, if anything, the failure of many major innovations of the Soviet system to take root shows about humanity. Instead, it is becoming a commonplace that communism and socialism "failed." Beneath a show of insight this formula consigns communism to the museum, where only scholars will stir its dust. It stops discussion just when it ought to be setting forth.

It was the specific field of Soviet studies that had the greatest responsibility for grasping the fragility of the Soviet system and which has the most to learn from the reassessment that ought to follow its collapse. For us in Soviet studies the sad reflec-

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tion must intrude: We were not ready for this. Soviet studies as a discipline did not anticipate, and still cannot easily account for, the changes that emerged from the Soviet system. Diverse as our perspectives were, none of us, until the very eve of the collapse, presented such a radical transformation of the system as a serious possibility. To put it bluntly, we were all wrong. Not, of course, about every aspect of Soviet reality, but about important aspects that generated or allowed the unexpected changes since 1985.

Of course, these intellectual failures cannot be limited to Soviet studies. Those studies have always reflected a larger intellectual context. The assumption that a system that had lost its ideological legitimacy could still tenaciously cling to power cannot be separated from the influential "realist" views of world politics or from Washington's preference for "pragmatists" over "ideologues." Our belief in the basic stability of the system cannot be seen in isolation from the wider culture's long-standing belief in the plasticity of man, a belief also evident today in much of our talk about "lifestyles."

This is precisely the attraction of an inquiry into the lessons of the collapse of communism that begins with its lessons for Soviet studies. It can begin with a clearly defined, finite body of conclusions from a definite set of data and proceed to fundamental philosophic questions in a way that is not completely speculative. In taking this path, we are in a better position than we were before the collapse of communism: we have much more evidence on the character of the Soviet system. Moreover, the political considerations that influenced both the totalitarian model and the rebellion against it are receding. Soviet communism now belongs to history. We can now look at it as we would any other interesting phenomenon in history.

We need a great debate about why our public understanding of Soviet communism did not contain within its range of possibilities the system's fragility and death. If error still has any sting for us, we should be driven to this debate. But it is also, like every moment in history when old ways of thinking suddenly crack open, an enormous opportunity for fresh thinking. This special issue of *The National Interest* is intended to provoke such a debate.

TO MAKE A beginning, in 1990 a group of scholars and officials organized the Washington Seminar on the Collapse of Communism at the Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, to discuss these issues. Out of these discussions there emerged a collaborative project to study the collapse of communism. The William H. Donner Foundation, which had already identified these issues as important, has generously supported this effort. The first fruits of the project are contained in this issue of *The National Interest*, along with additional essays by Robert Conquest, Nathan Glazer, and Irving Kristol. The cooperation of *The National Interest* has been immensely valuable in bringing this enterprise to birth.

The issue falls into three parts. First are six essays (Fukuyama, Kontorovich, Rush, Fairbanks, Reddaway, Sestanovich) that deal with what actually happened in the USSR, especially after 1982, to produce the collapse of the system. There were obviously a number of factors that interacted in a way that was not simple. The six essays try to cover the most important factors that were involved: Fukuyama, the role of long-term social and intellectual modernization; Kontorovich, economic stagnation; Rush, the accident of Gorbachev's leadership; Fairbanks, communist "political culture" or tradition; Reddaway, pressure from the public; Sestanovich, pressure from the West. We hope that readers will try to combine these explanations as they feel persuaded by them; we make no attempt to present such a synthesis, because we do not agree among ourselves about their relative weight and interrelationship. In the present

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early stage of the debate and the uncovering of the historical evidence, this seems the only honest approach. But it is essential to have the alternatives in view to discuss in any coherent way where we went wrong and what can be learned.

A second group of five essays deals with why we were so surprised by the communist collapse. This necessarily involves a critique of our Sovietology. Rutland and Odom deal more with social science interpretations of the USSR, Conquest and Pipes more with historians' interpretations of Soviet history, Malia with both. Rutland and Odom assess social science "from the inside," as practicing social scientists, while Malia and Conquest critique it from the outside.

In the third and final section Kristol, Glazer, and Bellow discuss communism in relation to the intellectuals in the West. The drama of communism and its shadows, anti-communism and anti-anticommunism, was not only a drama about "them," but about "us." Communism came from us, from the West, and returned after October 1917 to affect the life of the West in many ways both direct and indirect, ways difficult to spot and to define. Many of these elusive effects we are becoming aware of only as we experience the unexpected effects of communism's removal from the scene. The final essays attempt to give some sense of the texture of personal life as it was affected by the existence of communism, both as it was experienced at the time and as it looks in retrospect.

The diverse answers in the following essays show that the debate is just beginning. They differ not only about the correct assessment of Soviet communism, but about the content of past assessments. Fukuyama, for example, criticizes the totalitarian model for ignoring development, Malia praises the totalitarian model for not being muddled by development theories, while Odom praises the totalitarian model for its compatibility with development theories. But the authors do have two things in common. First, we spent most of our lives as anticommunists. There were others who made a different choice, but what we have learned through glasnost has only reinforced our original unease with Soviet communism. Second, none of us takes the view, which certainly is voiced elsewhere, that the collapse of communism calls for no serious rethinking because our views of Soviet communism proved to be about right. All of this is a waste of breath unless you were surprised. □

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Part I

Why Did It Happen?

Francis Fukuyama

Myron Rush

Stephen Sestanovich

Vladimir Kontorovich

Charles Fairbanks

Peter Reddaway

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The Modernizing Imperative

The USSR as an Ordinary Country

Francis Fukuyama

THE GORBACHEV-ERA earthquake that led to the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet state was due in significant part to autonomous changes in Soviet civil society, changes that were in some respects no different from the type of social evolution going on in other regions and countries with no experience of totalitarianism. The failure of a large section of the Sovietological community to perceive these underlying changes accounts in some measure for their blindness in not being able to anticipate the coming revolution.

Before making the case that changes occurring in civil society were important factors both in the collapse and in our blindness about the collapse, let me state at the beginning a number of caveats and qualifications. It should be absolutely clear that the Gorbachev-era earthquake had fundamentally political causes, which were its *sine qua non*. Perestroika was in no way a revolution from below. Frederick Starr's assertion that Gorbachev merely uncorked change rather than created it goes too far,[1] and those like Jerry Hough who argue that the USSR had become a pluralistic, participatory society prior to the late 1980s understand neither pluralism nor participation. It is perfectly possible to imagine substantially different and quite plausible outcomes to the events of the 1980s, given changes in the personalities involved. If Andropov or Chernenko had been younger and/or healthier men, perestroika most likely would never have happened. If Grishin had won the subsequent power struggle, if Gorbachev's personality had been different, if he had been less adroit in political maneuvering or Yegor Ligachev more so, the entire sequence of events leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union would have been derailed and might never have happened. Moreover, to say that civil society was a factor is not to deny the myriad of other causes that contributed to the collapse, including pressures from the international system, and the United States in particular. One can argue that a healthy Andropov would have put off the collapse only for a decade or so, but the importance of such purely political factors is undeniable, and perhaps even central in explaining these events.

On the other hand, political factors do not tell the whole story. For while the major mileposts of Soviet reform may have been initiated from above, they received crucial support, or at least acquiescence, from below. The Soviet intelligentsia did not react suspiciously to glasnost, but rather embraced it enthusiastically and proceeded to push the

Francis Fukuyama is a resident consultant at the RAND Corporation in Washington, DC, and author of *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press/Avon Books).

[1]Frederick S. Starr, "Soviet Union: A Civil Society," *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1988), p. 27.

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boundaries of the permissible in journalism and the arts. Soviet voters, when given a chance to express a preference, did not elect the old apparatus or neo-fascist Russian nationalists; they voted in 1990-91 for candidates from Democratic Russia and for Boris Yeltsin. Elites in the different Union republics organized themselves quickly into nationalist groups once given the chance, despite the fact that many Western Sovietologists believed they had been successfully assimilated as "new Soviet men." And finally, perhaps the most important factor was not what happened in civil society, but what did not happen: the old system's entrenched interests, particularly the Party, the army, and the police, did not act decisively to end the reform process, as they were designed to do. Clearly, something had happened "from below" to make all this possible.

To say that civil society played a significant role is to challenge one of the fundamental premises of classical Sovietology: namely, that the very uniqueness of communist totalitarianism as a political system lay in the fact that civil society had been all but abolished. It was politics, ideology, and the state that were supposed to shape the course of social life, and not the reverse. The sharp differences between communist societies and all others made the study of the former unique as well: the disciplines of Sovietology and, to a comparable degree, Sinology, were segregated in a separate ghetto from the rest of the field of comparative politics. The chief social science paradigm governing studies of comparative politics for the first two postwar decades, modernization theory, was held to apply to virtually all human societies except for communist ones, where the "normal" processes of political development had been arrested by an all-powerful state.

Sovietologists, therefore, did not study issues like political participation, party formation, or the development of civic culture, as did specialists in the politics of Europe, non-communist Asia, or Latin America; rather, they developed their own methodologies, like Kremlinology, to interpret the actions of the relatively small group of leaders—members of the Politburo, the Secretariat, or at most the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party—whose actions were deemed decisive in shaping Soviet politics and society. Communist societies were compared only to one another, not to non-communist societies.

In the final analysis, then, it was the totalitarian model that was responsible for the failure of many observers of the Soviet Union to foresee its collapse. This model was severely criticized by Sovietologists well before the end of the Brezhnev era, but the critique was often done in so polemical and clumsy a way that it was not taken seriously by many. In retrospect, this was a great misfortune for both sides of that debate, and it prevented everyone from anticipating the end of Soviet communism as clearly as they might otherwise have done.

The Totalitarian Model

THE UNDERESTIMATION of the importance of civil society in the former USSR is thus simply the reverse side of the overestimation of the "totalitarian model." That model, in its original formulation by Friedrich and Brzezinski,[2] was meant to describe both Nazi Germany and Stalin's USSR, which were held to be qualitatively different from, say, the right-wing dictatorships that characterized contemporary Latin America. Most traditional authoritarian regimes prior to the twentieth century maintained a monopoly of political power and could act in cruel and capricious ways, but

[2]See Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956 and 2nd ed., 1965). See also the original and revised editions of Merle Fainsod, *How Russia is Ruled* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953 and 1965).

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they generally left a substantial segment of civil society free of state control. Totalitarian regimes, by contrast, sought a complete monopoly of power throughout society, and the history of their rise to power was the history of their systematic conquest of all conceivable rival sources of power.

Other critical aspects of the totalitarian model as defined by Friedrich and Brzezinski included domination of society by a vanguard party, that is, by a small, elite, highly centralized Leninist-style organization; the existence of an official ideology; and technologically-conditioned monopolies of control over mass communications, the military, and the economy. The active manipulation of consciousness was critical in distinguishing totalitarianism from other types of authoritarian regimes: Soviet communism sought not just to enslave society, but to make the victims love their chains and affirm the legitimacy of their servitude.

In institutional terms, it was believed that the Soviet Communist Party maintained itself through the "circular flow of power." Within the confines of an elite Leninist party, a Central Committee appointed a general secretary and Politburo, which in turn appointed the members of the Central Committee. This relationship of mutual dependence, while not guaranteeing freedom from internal conflict, supposedly gave everyone an incentive not to diffuse power outwards beyond the 250 or so officials who made up the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission.

The totalitarian model was an "ideal type," and like all ideal types, it never fully described Soviet reality. But for all the criticism that the model came under in later years, it was a reasonably good description of the Soviet regime from the late 1920s up through Khrushchev's secret speech. That is to say, all institutions in Soviet society bearing names like labor union, church, newspaper, university, professional society, enterprise, peace committee, and the like, were emanations of the state, bearing very little resemblance to their counterparts in the non-communist world. And on the level of consciousness, there is copious testimony from those who lived through that period that a large number of Party members in those years, and an even larger number of those who staffed its apparatus, believed fervently in the ideology. They cried when Stalin died and listened in shocked disbelief when Khrushchev accused him of crimes against the Party.

Moreover, even after the totalitarian model had ceased to be an accurate description of Soviet reality by the late 1950s, the "post-totalitarian" state remained a distinct category of regime, different in crucial respects from a Latin American military dictatorship or an "oriental despotism."[3] For while the iron grip of police terror and ideological fervor had been lifted, the damage done to the normal institutions of civil society remained. This difference is quite evident if one considers that even under the most severe right-wing dictatorships—like those of Franco in Spain, Salazar in Portugal, South Korea under Park or Chun, or Chile's Pinochet—the church remained independent, a strong private business sector prospered intact, and labor unions and political parties survived either underground or in exile, ready to reconstitute themselves. While there were important differences among post-totalitarian regimes (Poland, for example, had a large private agricultural sector and an independent church), the revival of the *institutions* of Soviet civil society for the most part postdated rather than predated the coming of Gorbachev and reform.

The usefulness of "post-totalitarian" as a distinct category of regime suggests that we will not find evidence of an autonomous Soviet civil society in the usual places, that is,

[3]The term "post-totalitarian" has been used both by Juan Linz and Vaclav Havel to describe communist societies after their Stalinist phases. See Vaclav Havel *et al.*, *The Power of the Powerless* (London: Hutchinson, 1985).

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embodied in concrete civil institutions. We should not expect to look back and see that Soviet newspapers, labor unions, churches, and the like were in fact much stronger and more independent than we thought. The weakness of Russian civil society today, more than a year after the formal dissolution of the USSR, is evident for everyone to see: there have been elections, but no political parties to speak of; privatization, but no strong private sector. Labor unions and churches are only now gaining an independent voice.

A Proto-Civil Society

WHAT WE MUST look for, then, are not concrete civil institutions prior to Gorbachev, but a "proto-civil society" that laid the groundwork for what was to follow. This proto-civil society is evident in two respects. The first were changes in Soviet institutions that reduced their functionality as guardians of Soviet power, and became the basis for the emergence of a new, non-Soviet civil society after perestroika. The second were changes in consciousness—that is, in the way that elites and the population more broadly thought about their own system and its legitimacy, which in turn influenced how they would respond to revolutionary change when it was initiated from above.

In the first category, there was a clear diffusion of power within the Soviet Communist Party from the center to the periphery, on a republic, an *oblast* (regional government), and even a local party level. It was a truism of the classical model of totalitarianism that while the party rules called for democracy from below, the reality was always strictly dictatorship from above. But by the early 1970s there was growing evidence that the lower reaches of the party were acquiring a substantial degree of bargaining leverage against the center.[4] This was evident in economic affairs, where powerful *oblast* first secretaries were in a position to stymie reforms and initiatives coming from Moscow, just as enterprise directors were in a position to resist orders from central and republican ministries. The various economic and political institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences, many designed as propaganda instruments, quickly became sources of intellectual opposition to the old Soviet state. The decentralization of Soviet institutions was most clearly evident in certain of the Union republics, where the local party organization in effect became entities independent of the central committee apparatus back in Moscow. While Leonid Brezhnev played a critical role in placing his friend Sharaf Rashidov as first secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party, it was Rashidov and not the Central Committee personnel department who thereafter controlled most appointments in the Uzbek Party apparatus. Moscow may have tolerated the vast, corrupt cotton empire off which Rashidov got rich, but it did not create or control it.[5]

The growth of official "mafias" within the Communist Party was paralleled by the growth of mafias outside it. To this day we do not have reliable statistics on the size of the informal economy during the Brezhnev period, but estimates for the size of its overall contribution to Soviet GNP range as high as 25 percent. Much of this economic activity outside the official plan was either the work of private entrepreneurs—mostly *kolkhozniks* raising fruits and vegetables in their garden plots—or was carried out by informal groups who performed arbitrage, middleman, and even manufacturing functions. Though these sorts of activities flour-

[4]The first major effort to document this was Jerry Hough's *The Soviet Prefects* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[5]There were, of course, individual Muscovites who prospered under this scheme, like Brezhnev's own daughter Galina and her husband Churbanov.

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ished most in the non-Slavic republics, even in Russia they constituted an important source of flexibility in the otherwise rigidly controlled economy.

The importance of this "proto-civil society" is evident from subsequent events. In many cases, it was the local party organization, like Brazauskas's Lithuanian Communist Party, that took up nationalist themes and propelled the republics toward independence. In other cases, rather than form independent political parties, reformers were able to hijack parts of the old CPSU and government structures, and use them to advance reformist aims. This is essentially what Yeltsin did with the Russian Federation's structures in 1990-91. Indeed, without the concept of a proto-civil society, it would be impossible to account for the great differences in post-communist political development in Eastern Europe. Those countries with more developed proto-civil societies, like Poland and Hungary, were much better able to make a transition to genuine democratic structures later.

The decay of the classical "circular flow of power" model or any other institutional aspect of classical totalitarianism would not have been very consequential were it not for the second category of changes, those in the realm of consciousness. The almost universally held Western belief in the rock-solid stability of the Soviet system was based, ultimately, on certain assumptions about the nature of normative beliefs in the former USSR. The first was the belief that over the years, the "system" had legitimated itself, if not in the eyes of the people, then at least in the eyes of the Soviet elite that ran it.[6] The "system" was not simply coterminous with Marxist-Leninist ideology; rather, what was legitimate was what in the Brezhnev period was called the "real socialism" that had industrialized the country, beaten Hitler, risen to global superpower status, and achieved a significant degree of economic growth (at least up through the late 1970s). While Western observers recognized that there was a considerable amount of cynicism within the Soviet elite over ideology, most assumed that the administrators of the system had a very powerful self-interest in its perpetuation, and would not accept change that seriously threatened to undermine it.

It went beyond this, however. There was a widely held assumption among Sovietologists that the broad mass of the Soviet population as well as the elites had also come to view the system as "legitimate." Unlike some Eastern European populations, the Soviet people—and particularly Russians—were seen as atomized, dependent and authority-craving. This was held to be a characteristic of Russian society from pre-Bolshevik days that had only been reinforced by Stalinist terror. In the words of the nineteenth-century French traveler, the Marquis de Custine, the Russians were a race "broken to slavery." Soviet society was not, therefore, a tinderbox of revolutionary passions held down only by the brute force of police terror; rather, it was a functional society, organized according to different normative standards than the democracies of the West.

Ironically, the view that both elites and the broader population accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet system was held by Sovietologists on both the right and left. On the right, many wanted to emphasize the deeply rooted character of Soviet expansionism and dictatorship, while on the left there was a desire to see the old Soviet Union as a real if imperfect alternative to Western capitalist democracy. Fewer scholars on the right thought communism had achieved a broad legitimacy, but they for the most part believed that legitimacy counted for much less than power in that system.

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[6]For one of the standard works on the subject of legitimacy in the former USSR, see T. H. Rigby and Ferenc Feher, eds., *Political Legitimation in Communist Systems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

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It was in the realm of consciousness, however, that totalitarianism failed most completely. Gorbachev did not force the Soviet intelligentsia to take up the cause of reform. Brezhnev-era academic institutes were staffed with several echelons of economists who were familiar with "bourgeois" Western economic theory and ready to implement it. From the late Brezhnev period on, the Soviet intelligentsia had almost complete access to contemporary Western materials, regardless of ideological content. Within the party itself the corrective mechanisms that were supposed to keep the totalitarian machine on course failed, largely because critical people in its apparatus came quickly to see the old system as illegitimate. Not only could Gorbachev tap the Yakovlevs, Shevardnadzes, and Yeltsins for top posts, but custodians of the old system throughout the party, army, and police of the kind who in 1964 conspired to remove Khrushchev from power did not have the competence or the drive to do so in the late 1980s. (Yegor Ligachev has told Western audiences that no one in the Politburo even considered the possibility of intervention during the emigration crisis in East Germany in mid-1989.)

As a measure of the broader Soviet population's ability to think for itself, the various elections that were held beginning in 1990 could serve as a limited but revealing measure. In the local elections held in the spring of 1990, candidates from the liberal Democratic Russia movement won fifty-seven of sixty-five seats in Moscow; while seventy "patriotic" nationalist or neo-Bolshevik candidates ran, only two were elected.[7] The percentages of votes for "democrats" were lower in provincial cities and in the countryside, but this kind of voting pattern is absolutely typical for non-communist democratizing countries at a comparable level of social development. The Party apparatus put its weight behind electing Ryzhkov in the election for Russian president in June 1991, and there were plenty of other unsavory authoritarian candidates who could have been elected. But it was for Boris Yeltsin that Russians voted.

An Ordinary Country

IF WE WANT to explain why the political system began to diffuse power, and why there emerged a broad crisis in the Soviet belief system, we can look to two sorts of explanations, one particular to totalitarian systems, the other a more general one applicable to all societies. The first concerned the inability of totalitarianism to perpetuate itself in a pure form. The crucial event in this respect was the ending of the terror. For once it became clear that the state would not kill or incarcerate large numbers of people to enforce its rule, the balance of power between the state and society began to shift. From now on, failure of a ministry, region, or enterprise to meet its plan targets would not be punishable by death or imprisonment. Coercion took many other forms than outright terror, of course, and kept the nature of autonomous social action within strict limits. Still, the cessation of terror meant that the state-Party apparatus would increasingly have to bribe or cajole economic actors to get them to do its bidding.

But the more important types of long-term social changes leading to the breakdown of the Soviet system were characteristic of non-communist societies as well. They had to do with the political effects of the transition from an agricultural economy to a modern industrial one. In this respect, Soviet society developed much like other non-communist ones; totalitarianism delayed but did not derail the political development process in the USSR. The imperatives of industrial maturity eventually forced a breakdown of the political system because truly modern technological societies cannot flourish except

[7]See Julia Wishnevsky, "Patriots Urge Annulment of RSFSR Elections," *Radio Liberty Research Bulletin* (April 6, 1990), pp. 18-21.

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in an atmosphere permitting a certain degree of freedom.[8]

The reasons for this are most evident in the economic sphere. Centrally planned socialism was a perfectly adequate engine of economic growth through the stage of industrialization represented by Europe or America in the year 1940, and characterized by heavy industries like steel, chemicals, and automobiles that populated the American Midwestern rust belt. But in the subsequent half century of economic development, modern economies have become vastly more complex, information- and communications-intensive, service oriented, dependent on constant technological innovation, and requiring increasingly high skill levels in the labor force. Under these circumstances economic decision-making has to become decentralized to be efficient. *Goskomtsen*, the former Soviet state committee on prices, reviewed some 200,000 prices per year, which represented 42 percent of all price decisions in the Soviet Union. This represents only a tiny fraction of the number of prices determined by markets in an advanced industrial economy like Japan or the United States, where a single airliner can consist of over a million different parts, each with its own price. The economic aspects of socialism clashed head-on, therefore, with the broad direction of modern industrial development.

Beyond economics, industrial maturity has a major impact on social and political attitudes as well. In Raymond Aron's phrase, "technological complexity will strengthen the managerial class at the expense of the ideologists and militants."[9] It is very hard to keep the elites of modern industrial societies isolated from larger trends in the world given the rapid proliferation of communications technologies. The populations of complex, modern urban societies, increasingly well-educated and cosmopolitan, begin demanding more than simple security and food on the table. Above all, they begin to demand recognition of themselves and their social status, expressed as a demand for individual rights and political participation.[10] While illiterate peasants in an agricultural society may defer to the authority of a landlord, warlord, or commissar, it is much less likely that a college-educated manager, scientist, or journalist will do so. In this respect, the Soviet Union was no different from Spain, Portugal, Taiwan, South Korea, or any other country that has made the transition from an agricultural to an urban-industrial society in the past couple of generations.

The view that technocrats would be the "gravediggers of communism" has been much ridiculed over the years, because the technological imperative could be violated by political authorities for so long. (One notorious example of this was the aircraft designer Tupolev, who did some of his most innovative work while a prisoner in Stalin's gulag.) But while the Party could delay the technological imperative, they could not put it off forever if they were to remain militarily and economically competitive with the West. The scientific elite had increasing contact with their Western counterparts over the years; the industrial/managerial elite had less, but promotion within it was nonetheless based on performance, not ideology. (A typical example of this generation was Gorbachev's second-to-last prime minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, a technocrat and former head of a giant manufacturing conglomerate, Uralmash, who complacently supported perestroika until some time in 1990, when it had already become too late to turn back the clock.)

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[8]Obviously, this freedom does not have to be as extensive as in Europe or America; the rapidly developing Asian NICs were economically free but authoritarian politically.

[9]Aron quoted in Jeremy Azrael, *Managerial Power and Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.4.

[10]On this broader point, see my article, "Capitalism and Democracy: The Missing Link," *Journal of Democracy* (July 1992): pp. 100-110.

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Part of the reason that the political effects of economic modernization were slow to be felt had to do with its forced nature. Between 1926 and 1960, the Soviet population went from 18 percent urban to approximately 49 percent.[11] Such figures overstate the real degree of modernization that took place, however: a Soviet factory worker in the late 1950s was still a displaced peasant working on a deliberately simplified assembly line. This population had a much lower level of literacy, much less formal education, than their counterparts in Western Europe or the United States. Moreover, as Moshe Lewin has pointed out, much of the statistical urbanization that took place in this period was in fact the simple transplanting of entire peasant villages into urban areas, where the mores and social relationships of the countryside still prevailed. But in the generation following Khrushchev, a broader and deeper social modernization process occurred. The urban population grew to 65 percent of the total by 1985. As late as 1959, 91 percent of workers and 98 percent of peasants had no more than a four year elementary school education, while by 1985 the figure for manual workers was only 18 percent. By Gorbachev's time, fifteen million Soviet citizens had received a higher education.[12]

The importance of this kind of broad socio-economic modernization is evident if one looks at the role of the military. In China, Deng Xiaoping and his conservative allies were able to call in a peasant army from the provinces to put down the student protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989. In the former Soviet Union, by contrast, the military units called into Moscow by the State Committee for the State of Emergency on August 19, 1991, proved to be very unreliable counterrevolutionaries. The officers and soldiers were not peasant boys, unfamiliar with and distrustful of city ways; many appeared to be as politically aware as the Muscovite population they were intended to suppress. The Red Army of the 1950s, by contrast, would have consisted largely of politically inert peasants, who would not have felt any squeamishness about killing unruly civilians.

Out of the Ghetto

A NUMBER OF Sovietologists noticed these broad trends in Soviet society, and argued that it would eventually be assimilable into the developmental model of the non-communist world.[13] By the early 1980s, most mainstream Sovietologists accepted the fact that the totalitarian model was no longer adequate for describing Soviet reality. It was an unfortunate accident of academic history, however, that the scholar most closely associated with the "civil society" interpretation—Professor Jerry Hough of Duke University—overstated the case in such an extreme way that the entire argument was discredited in the eyes of any number of other Sovietologists. Hough in his study of Soviet prefects noticed back in the late 1960s that the Soviet political system was not behaving as it should according to the totalitarian model. Rather than making the case that totalitarianism was gradually eroding and might some day explode or collapse, Hough by the late 1970s began to assert that democratization had already happened in Brezhnev's USSR: "the Soviet leadership almost seems to have made the Soviet Union closer to the spirit of the pluralist model of American political science than is

[11]See Moshe Lewin, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon: A Historical Interpretation*, expanded edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 30-31.

[12]Ibid., p. 45.

[13]One of the most sensible of these was Richard Lowenthal; see his "The Ruling Party in a Mature Society" in Mark G. Field, *Social Consequences of Modernization in Communist Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

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the United States..."[14] In the end, Hough's motivation could be explained by the Cold War: he wanted to show his fellow Americans that they had no grounds for feeling morally superior to the Soviets, and therefore had no reason for resisting detente, arms control, and the like. This in turn provoked more conservative scholars to assert that ideology had forced Soviet society to develop along a path utterly different from Western ones, and blinded them to evidence that Soviet society was indeed evolving independently of the Soviet state.

Now that everyone admits the Cold War is over, it is time for Sovietology to come out of its conceptual ghetto. Russia is today just another troubled state, trying to make a difficult simultaneous transition to both democracy and markets. If it relapses into authoritarianism of either a Russian nationalist or neo-Bolshevik form, it is unlikely that the new rulers would attempt to revive the totalitarian experiment, and even less likely that they would succeed even if they were to try. The skills that students of the Soviet successor states will have to bring to bear will not be different in essence from those of students of other regions: they will have to become familiar with problems of democratization and economic modernization in Asia and Latin America, and apply broader developmental models to their part of the world. And those seeking a retrospective account of the collapse of communist systems will have to open their eyes as well to the forms of proto-civil society that existed in the former communist world. □

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[14] Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 8.

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Fortune and Fate

Myron Rush

RETROSPECTIVELY, it might appear that the Soviet Union was rotten and ready to expire in 1985, when Gorbachev came to power. Yet, to my knowledge, no Sovietologist offered that judgment. This was not because they were all ignorant of their subject. The Soviet Union, while manifestly in trouble as many observed, was not poised for a collapse, nor was it even in acute crisis. The Soviet Union was viable and probably could have lasted another decade or two, with good fortune a good bit longer; but deeply flawed, it was vulnerable to adverse chance events. Viable but vulnerable, the Soviet Union was hostage to bad fortune. That the invalid did not live, but died at the hands of an unlikely doctor employing untried medicine owed much to chance. The reforms Gorbachev adopted were not the result of a necessity imposed on the Soviet leadership by the threat of the regime's imminent collapse, nor was it due to pressures emerging from society whereby disgruntled workers and a reformist intelligentsia imposed their will on the leadership. The Soviet Union succumbed to ill-conceived reforms originating in the leadership, to poor governance, and to bad fortune.

While not actually in crisis in 1985, the Soviet regime was headed for one because of its failure to deal with three key points of vulnerability. First, the centrally planned economy was stagnant. Deprived of its past sources of growth from an expanding labor force and ever-increasing inputs of capital, the economy had poor prospects. Absent major changes in foreign and domestic policy to be discussed shortly, the economy was unlikely to resume growth and was probably fated to contract slowly. The weakness of the economy gave rise to a second vulnerability: widespread dissatisfaction and disillusion throughout Soviet society. Ordinary people no longer experienced improvements in their poor living conditions. Disillusion was strongest among intellectuals. While they had long since ceased to believe in a future communist utopia, they now were contemptuous of their senescent leaders and unresponsive to the ubiquitous slogans and continual campaigns. Even the chief men in power, once they had ousted Khrushchev, perhaps the last true believer, lacked confidence that the regime could perform well. Yet, despite their disillusion, none of these groups—neither the leadership, nor the intellectuals, nor the workers—rejected the existing system.

A third, more fundamental vulnerability of the regime stemmed from its corruption of the entire people. Labor discipline had eroded and ordinary workers felt diminished responsibility toward society. The intellectual and political classes, drained of initiative by a repressive hierarchical system and deterred from action by fear of the security agencies, were passive. This corruption of the people by the Leninist version of socialism boded ill for efforts to

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revitalize the regime, but it contributed to the regime's long-standing and continuing stability. Moreover, the people's passivity opened the way for major policy change if a vigorous and ambitious leader came to power.

Some observers have identified another key vulnerability, widespread disbelief in the ideology, which in their view doomed the regime. Granted, the ideology had lost its vitality and capacity to inspire, but it was not moribund. Its central tenet—the need to abolish private ownership in the means of production—had long since been carried out, so the ideology in effect was embodied in the regime's basic institutions. The schools and the established media propagated this ideology, and this, together with widespread and effective fear, precluded popular consideration of alternative institutions.[1] The rulers, despite their power, were constrained not to alter existing institutions contrary to the chief principles of their professed ideology, since it helped legitimate their rule. Diminished belief in the ideology, therefore, did not portend the regime's early demise, for it still weighed heavily on rulers and ruled alike.

From this account of the Soviet Union's key vulnerabilities—a debilitated economy, a dissatisfied people, a passive society corrupted by Stalinist socialism—two conclusions follow: the disease was deep-seated and probably had no lasting remedy; and it posed no threat in the near term of acute crisis or impending collapse.

This view of the state of affairs in 1985, which was widely shared at that time, differs in one key feature from the version that became dominant subsequently, especially after the Soviet Union's collapse. This dominant version also emphasizes the debility of the economy along with widespread popular dissatisfaction, but it denies the passivity of the intellectuals and of the political classes. Indeed, those who subscribe to this version see a vibrant intelligentsia engaged in strong criticism of the existing order, pointing the way to basic reforms that would necessarily alter the regime; far from being passive, society—or at least the intelligentsia—was exerting strong pressures on the leadership. In this interpretation, the appearance of political stability when Gorbachev became Party general secretary was deceptive; his reforms were a necessary response to society's pressures for political transformation.

There are serious difficulties with this argument. Contemporary evidence of society's pressure on the leadership was weak. Ordinary workers were largely quiescent in the decade before Gorbachev. While there were real if muted stirrings among establishment intellectuals, the boldest among them (like Alexander Bovin and Fyodor Burlatsky) suffered career setbacks that effectively cowed the rest. A critical test of the pressure thesis is what happened after Gorbachev instituted glasnost. True, important groups among the intelligentsia welcomed reform and responded enthusiastically to Gorbachev's invitation to help further it. But far from being an independent force compelling Gorbachev to move farther and more rapidly than he wanted to, in the early years they were fairly easily manipulated by him. As late as April 1988, three years after Gorbachev came to power, the intelligentsia grew silent when it appeared for a time that Gorbachev's chief conservative opponent, Yegor Ligachev, had gained the upper hand. If the intelligentsia so readily lost its voice for reform even when they had the general secretary on their side, how likely is it that previously they had pressured a conservative leadership that manifestly opposed basic reform? Not until 1989, four years after Gorbachev unleashed glasnost, did the intelligentsia become an independent force that effectively pressured Gorbachev to reform more rapidly than he intended, thereby forc-

[1]Alexander Solzhenitsyn had offered the Politburo a way to continue rule while departing from socialism, which it of course rejected. Some human rights advocates pointed the way towards democracy, but they had few followers.

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ing him into unwanted confrontations with his conservative opposition.

The most powerful force to emerge from society in the late Soviet period was not the impulse to reform the economy or to democratize the government, but the force of nationalism, which by 1991 had grown sufficiently powerful to destroy the Soviet Union. But when Gorbachev first came to power, and for the next few years, political nationalism was largely a latent force. Fear of the repressive agencies, reinforced by the expectation that Communist Party rule would endure, effectively suppressed the political expression of nationalism, no less than the impulse to reform and the quest for democratization. Not until Gorbachev lifted fear, a feat he had accomplished by the spring of 1989, was society in a position to impose its will on the Soviet leadership.

If society did not compel the Soviet leadership to institute fundamental reform, it might be supposed that change was forced on the leaders by circumstances. Perhaps the failure of their past economic and security policies persuaded them that the regime's collapse was impending and that only fundamental reform could save it. But this assuredly was not the view of the conservative faction, whose notion of perestroika had fairly narrow limits. Neither was it the view of the chief author of the reforms that ultimately led to the Soviet Union's destruction, for Gorbachev denied in its aftermath that a collapse had been imminent when he came to power. As we have argued, society was relatively passive in the mid-1980s. The regime that had survived both Stalin's revolution from above and Hitler's depredations had proven its stability. The economy was stagnant and was falling farther behind the West, but inflation was not a serious problem; agriculture, supplemented by grain and meat imports, fed the Soviet people adequately, perhaps better than in the past; and industry provided them with their basic needs. The economy had been in worse shape, arguably, in Khrushchev's last years, 1963 and 1964.

Buying Time

THERE WAS NO compelling need for the Soviet Union to enter on the dangerous path of systemic reform. Had it done nothing, its survival until the end of the century would have been likely. Moreover, a useful remedy for its most acute difficulty—the slowed growth of the economy—was at hand. It provided no cure, but was a powerful palliative that might have added considerably to Soviet longevity.

The slowed growth of the Soviet Union had deep causes arising from the nature of the command economy, but the condition was severely aggravated by the security policy that Brezhnev initiated after Khrushchev's ouster.[2] Brezhnev's policy of continual growth in Soviet defense spending, which was maintained for a quarter century from 1965 until 1989, seven years after his death, contributed importantly to the reduced growth of capital investment, hence reduced growth of the economy. By cutting defense spending sharply—by 10 percent, 20 percent, or reasonably, much more—a prudent conservative leader in 1985 could have improved the Soviet economic situation markedly.[3]

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[2]The post-Stalin leadership had reduced defense spending in the mid-1950s, and Khrushchev subsequently maintained spending at a fairly steady level until his removal.

[3]This need not have worsened the Soviet security position. Appropriately executed—with credible publicity, on-site inspections, abstention from an aggressive foreign policy—deep Soviet arms cuts almost certainly would have induced compensating cuts in western spending, as it had under Malenkov and Khrushchev in the fifties and again under Gorbachev in 1989. By then, however, it was too late to realize the substantial potential benefits of large reduction in defense spending.

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Not all the resources taken from the military would have flowed easily into the civilian economy. Much of them were embodied in arms-making machinery that could not readily be converted to other uses. But such a program could have avoided the massive capital investments in defense industry that occurred between 1985 and 1989. It would have liberated large numbers of highly skilled workers and abundant natural resources, including energy, for use in the civilian economy. Such a redirection of investment, administered by a still-intact Communist Party leadership, would doubtless have been carried out *inefficiently*, like everything the centrally planned economy had done since its inception, but it could have been effective, as the state generally was *effective* in achieving its *primary* objectives. In the four decades until the 1970s the overall Soviet economy had grown chiefly by extrinsic means—by rapidly increasing supplies of labor and capital, and much less by increased efficiency in their use. In the 1970s, however, the growth of labor and capital slowed markedly, contributing to the economic and social malaise. By using resources diverted from the military sector, the civilian economy might again, for a limited period at least, have experienced substantial extrinsic growth.

The liberated funds could have been employed both to improve the standard of living of the people and the availability of capital, which had suffered as rising defense expenditures took an increasing share of national income. Funds diverted from defense spending (amounting to perhaps 5 percent or more of gross national product) would not have enabled the leaders to eliminate the basic defects of the centrally planned economy, but they would have made it possible to compensate for the slowed growth of capital investment and worsening capital productivity and to improve work incentives significantly by raising stagnant living standards. Such an infusion of resources into the civilian economy would have made it more productive, opening a period of sustained economic growth that could have lifted the malaise that weighed on society and thus helped the regime to survive for an extended period. If nothing else, it could have bought time to seek lasting solutions.

Improbable Succession

THIS COURSE OF action, which arguably might have put off for years or decades the looming economic crisis, required the succession to office of an insightful and far-sighted leader.[4] Alternatively, succession might have brought to power another weak figure (say, Victor Grishin) as happened during the two previous successions. Instead, as chance would have it, the 1985 succession brought to office an aberrant figure whose course toward revolution (as noted previously) was not forced on him by an aroused society or by compelling circumstances; it stemmed from his highly individual perceptions and experimental bent, his openness to the ideas of intellectuals (including close advisors like Alexander Yakovlev), and the erosion of his commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Stalinist institutions to which it had given rise.

The Soviet system of cadres selection was designed to prevent leaders with such political characteristics from advancing in it. That Gorbachev nevertheless rose to its summit, winning the office that enabled him to command the Party's vast personnel and resources, was due to a series of fortu-

[4]Yuri Andropov may have possessed these qualities, and if able-bodied, conceivably might have executed such a policy, but his actions while in office strongly suggest that he was not headed in that direction.

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nate events that borders on the providential.[5] His improbable rise was possible, of course, only because Gorbachev had a strong will to power and, in addition, the prudence to conceal as necessary his true beliefs and character. His rise from Party secretary in a minor province to Central Committee secretary when already in his late forties was due to chance encounters with Yuri Andropov, who became his life-long patron. Although Gorbachev was well-placed as the only youthful and vigorous figure in the Politburo, Brezhnev evidently did not intend him to be in the line of succession. Gorbachev entered the Politburo as the Party secretary for agriculture, a notorious graveyard for ambitious politicians. That he survived the repeated bad grain harvests of the following years he probably owed to Andropov's 1982 challenge to Brezhnev, which was prompted by the sudden death of the second secretary, Mikhail Suslov, and benefited from opportune scandals involving Brezhnev's immediate family. Granted that Andropov commanded powerful resources, including key elements of the political police and alliances with senior leaders, his challenge was risky. Both protagonists were gravely ill, and Andropov was fortunate that Brezhnev succumbed some months before he did. (Brezhnev died in November 1982; nine months later Andropov lay incapacitated and mortally ill.) The conservative forces were strong enough to prevent Gorbachev from succeeding Andropov in February 1984, but later that year they were seriously weakened by the death of Marshal Ustinov, the defense minister.

Finally, Gorbachev's succession to Konstantin Chernenko as general secretary in March 1985, after being passed over the previous year, was a near thing. That it was not a mere formality, as many observers then supposed, is clear from Yegor Ligachev's claim that he and other conservative reformers not then serving in the Politburo played a crucial role in organizing support for Gorbachev's elevation. Of course, this was a self-serving reminder of Gorbachev's debt to him, but if it had not been true Ligachev would not have dared voice such a claim before a Communist Party Conference.[6] Had the choice been made by the Politburo independently of outside forces, as occurred usually, the majority would probably have favored Victor Grishin, the mediocre and corrupt head of the Moscow Party. Instead, the minority faction, which had earlier been built by Andropov, used the KGB and reformist elements in the Party *apparat* to pressure the Politburo on Gorbachev's behalf. Moreover, in choosing Gorbachev, his supporters did not knowingly choose the revolutionary course he would follow, for they did not realize the depth of his dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs, or his tenuous attachment to existing institutions. Had he not concealed these things, he would not have survived Brezhnev's repeated purges of the Politburo; moreover, had his supporters in 1985 not been ignorant of his concealed views, they surely would have rejected him.

Felix Culpa

FORTUNE CONTINUED to favor Gorbachev during his period of rule. While he availed himself of the Communist Party's ingrained habit of obedience to command it to commit suicide, there were times when his opposition still had the means to rebel and were tempted to do so. They lacked the will to act, however, until despera-

[5]Among the dozens of general secretaries in ruling Communist Parties, there are only two other instances where the system failed to prevent a dangerous leader from rising to the top: in Hungary, Imre Nagy in the mid 1950s, and in Czechoslovakia, Alexander Dubcek in 1968.

[6]Hedrick Smith in *The New Russians* (New York: Random House, 1990) says he received private communications from well-connected party officials asserting that Gorbachev at the threshold of power was almost blocked by Victor Grishin.

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tion forced them to it when it was already too late. It was not luck alone, of course, that preserved Gorbachev, for the regime had become so impoverished politically that those who remained to oppose him were mostly bureaucrats and time-servers.

Gorbachev's possession of the power to destroy the regime was a gift of fortune. Since the holding of power by a crypto-revolutionary was due to chance, so also in large measure was the outcome, the collapse in 1991 of the regime and the USSR. But is it possible that had it not been Gorbachev, other leaders with a similar political character might have emerged to follow his course of action, and thus produce the same outcome? This seems most unlikely, for it is hard to discern potential Gorbachevs in his generation or the next. In the early 1980s it was widely supposed that numerous capable leaders on the middle-level of the Party apparatus had been held down by the gerontocracy, and that now with its passing they would assert themselves. But despite the opportunities provided by the political turbulence of the late 1980s, only two remarkable figures emerged: Gorbachev himself and Yeltsin, whose outspokenness makes it seem inconceivable that he could pass the barriers the regime maintained to prevent dangerous leaders from becoming general secretary. If there was another figure who had the potential to become general secretary and then duplicate Gorbachev's work in destroying Communist rule from within, he has remained well-concealed.

To call attention to the key role of chance and personality in the fall of communism is not to deny the powerful influence of necessity and circumstance. Having become general secretary, Gorbachev might well have been content to rule through the existing institutions like his predecessors, had not their worsening performance produced hard times. Similarly, had fortune not brought Gorbachev to power, this need not have saved the regime from collapse, for it still would have had to deal with its serious vulnerabilities and might have failed, with dire consequences. Nevertheless, assume Gorbachev did not replace Chernenko in 1985 and the USSR assuredly would still exist in 1993.

Had the regime experienced in 1985 an improbably fortunate succession (fortunate for the regime's survival) instead of the improbably unfortunate Gorbachev succession, it might have gained a valuable respite. It would have been free to cut back defense spending sharply, liberating substantial labor and capital for productive work in the civilian economy. By these means the regime might have gained time to seek more lasting solutions to its deep ailments. If, on the other hand, a bold and desperate leader had succeeded Chernenko in 1985, the Soviet Union might have sought an alternate way out of its difficulties through nuclear blackmail and foreign adventures. Most probable of all, had Gorbachev not succeeded in 1985, mediocre governance would have continued. The USSR today would be not much different from what it was in 1985, stable but stagnant, viable but vulnerable, and able to continue so into the next century, to be overtaken in time by a live-or-die crisis.

In reality, the man the Politburo chose to lead the Communist Party was a brilliant tactician, blindly self-confident without realizing where he was headed, a decent and humane man who at each critical juncture refused to return to the repressive ways of the past. The path by which Gorbachev led a stagnant Soviet Union to collapse can be briefly summarized. His initial economic program, doubtless influenced by residual illusions about the regime's potentialities and the need to keep the support of conservative allies, was ill-conceived and wildly ambitious. As its failure became increasingly apparent in early 1987, Gorbachev began to favor more radical policies, but these met strong resistance from conservative reformers in the leadership. Initially, Gorbachev sought to overcome their resistance by mobilizing intellectuals, especially in the media. To encourage intellectuals to speak out in support of his increasingly radical

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aims and to encourage officials to exercise more initiative, Gorbachev found it necessary to reduce their fears. Fear, though, was the foundation of the regime.

In the spring of 1988, Gorbachev took a second fateful step. Recognizing that radical economic reform required a transformation of the political system, he launched an attack on the Party apparatus, which since Stalin's death had been the sovereign institution that gave coherence to the regime. He weakened the appointive principle (which was embodied in the apparat's *nomenklatura* system) and elevated the electoral principle, which till then had a constitutional status but lacked substance.

These two revolutionary moves—the abatement of fear and the holding of real elections—culminated in the televised sessions of the newly elected Congress of Peoples' Deputies (June 1989), when delegates openly criticized the regime's performance. This was a critical juncture at which Gorbachev showed himself to be a revolutionary. Numerous leading Party officials had been defeated in the elections, which seriously discredited the Party apparatus. A prudent reformer of the Soviet system, such as Khrushchev had proved himself to be in the decade after Stalin's death, would have retreated and renewed his alliance with the Party apparatus, the sole reliable basis of his power. Instead, Gorbachev launched new attacks on the Party apparatus, further discrediting it and pushing it into a decline from which it never recovered. Whatever miscalculations underlay Gorbachev's behavior at this juncture, it demonstrated that he put reform before stability and willingly placed the regime at increased risk. He behaved similarly after the elections of 1990, when the Party apparatus was routed in key republics and provinces.

Gorbachev evidently sought to balance strengthened popular legislatures with a weakened Party apparatus, the two together providing the legs for a renewed regime and for his own personal power; but he was building on sand. Thus it was due partly to political blindness, but also—and this was decisive—to his preference for reform over Party-based stability, that Gorbachev increasingly placed the Soviet regime in jeopardy. While Gorbachev initially had mobilized a fairly quiescent intelligentsia, reduced fear and popular elections subsequently made it an independent force, compelling Gorbachev to move faster and farther than he wanted to and forcing him into confrontations with conservatives that he preferred to avoid. But at every decisive juncture, Gorbachev sided with reform, even as it shaded into revolution. Had he instead sided with the reactionaries, it might still have been possible to defeat the democrats and nationalists.

IT IS NOT here a question of whether Gorbachev deserves personal credit for the destruction of the Soviet Union (although a good measure of credit seems his due); rather it is a question of whether he was responsible for its overthrow. Despite his vacillation, clearly he was the responsible agent. He brought about the abatement of fear, to a point where the rulers feared the people more than they feared the rulers. He caused the decisive weakening of the Party apparatus, to a point where it lost its capacity to manage the economy or defend the regime. While he played along with the conservatives' ineffectual use of force against separatist forces in the Baltic states (in January 1991), he then acted decisively to prevent violence from escalating. Finally, when the weak-willed conservative opposition at last took action in desperation (August 1991), he resisted it and, too late to save his career, threw in his lot with the democrats. Not a noble or heroic leader, Gorbachev was a necessary actor in the destruction of the Soviet Union.

Since Gorbachev's coming to power was due to the working of chance contrary to the design of the succession process (which aimed to exclude "deviationists"), and since Gorbachev in power became the agent of the regime's destruction, clearly the role of chance in this chain of events was crucial. □

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Did the West Undo the East?

Stephen Sestanovich

On our crowded planet there are no longer any internal affairs. The Communists say, "Don't interfere in our internal affairs. Let us strangle our citizens in peace and quiet." But I tell you: Interfere more and more. Interfere as much as you can. We beg you to come and interfere.

-Alexander Solzhenitsyn, 1975

THE COLD WAR, it was often said, was a struggle not merely between states but between incompatible social and political systems. There was as a result no issue of Western policy more important, more persistent or more controversial than whether external influences might alter the internal evolution of Soviet communism. In different ways and at different times, the problem preoccupied and divided realists and moralists, liberals and conservatives, militarists and appeasers, businessmen and legislators, Europeans and Americans, those who claimed to know what kind of pressure would work and those who said the effort was futile, even dangerous. Most recently, of course, with communism in ruins, the problem has also come to preoccupy those who want a share of the credit—or want to dispute someone else's.

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In 1947, when George Kennan sketched out the strategy of containment in his legendary "X" article, he promised a gigantic payoff—a remade Soviet Union. Moreover, he suggested, the transformation of the system could be pursued indirectly. Western policy had only to be steady enough to check the Russians "at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world." The resulting frustration of communist designs would "promote tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the break-up or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power."

Although it was the intellectual bedrock of containment, this theory of how communism would come to grief never enjoyed universal support. Over time, it had to contend with the growing suspicion that the Soviet system, far from being vulnerable, was just as powerful as it said it was. For some, a competing conception of Soviet change suggested itself, according to which it was international tension that kept the system intact. In this view (now supported by Kennan himself), communism coped fine with conflict, but could not endure normalcy; improved relations and increased contacts with the West would inevitably rob dictatorship of its rationale; "mellowing" would ensue.

Fully understanding the external sources of communism's demise, in other words, means weighing the impact of both conflict

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and conciliation. In particular, it means comparing the internal consequences for the Soviet system of the two most distinctive Western policies of the past twenty years: the would-have-been "era of negotiation" known as detente, and the military build-up and harsh anti-Soviet rhetoric of the Reagan administration.

At first glance, this comparison between the 1970s and the 1980s may not seem like much of a contest. Certainly if the question is whether the USSR was shaken more deeply by victories or by defeats, the answer has to be relatively obvious, and the 1980s, a truly miserable time for Soviet foreign policy, will be judged the easy winner. Nevertheless, two important qualifications—one for each decade—have to be added to this verdict. The acute international tensions for which the early 1980s are usually remembered tell only part of the decade's story. They were followed by a half decade of growing coziness between Soviet and American leaders, and this too contributed to the happy result. As for the detente of the 1970s, its claim to have begun digging totalitarianism's grave is weak. All the same, this was the moment when the Soviet Union agreed to treat human rights as a principle of East-West relations—an act of real importance for the disaster to come.

The oscillations and unpredictability of democratic decision-making are frequently said to produce poor performance in foreign policy, and to compare the 1970s and the 1980s is certainly to confirm the incoherence of Western attempts to influence the Soviet Union. Yet the story's successful denouement is a powerful reason to think again about the presumed costs of erratic policy. The infuriatingly inconsistent West turned out to be an opponent that Soviet communism simply could not understand, much less subdue. In the end, the democratic weakness that so many bemoaned may actually have helped to bring victory in reach.

The Hard Eighties

NO ONE disagrees that Russian revolutions of the past were set off by international defeats—1917 by the First World War, 1905 by the loss to the Japanese; even the end of serfdom in 1861 is commonly traced to the Crimean War. "Explaining" a revolution in this way doesn't mean that defeat created social strains where none existed (abolitionist intellectuals, for example, had been promoting freedom for the serfs for decades), nor that in the war's aftermath events could only move in one direction (the Bolsheviks' victory was a matter of incredible luck). But any serious interpreter of the historical record begins by recognizing that in all three of these cases, war fundamentally altered the political balance of forces at home. If the causal links are so straightforward when we analyze the past, what (apart from churlish feelings toward Ronald Reagan) makes anyone dispute them in our own time?

Admittedly, the Soviet Union suffered no outright military defeat in the first half of the 1980s. Nevertheless, by the middle of the decade, the outlook on almost every front of Soviet foreign policy was poor and clearly deteriorating. The list of failures needs very little elaboration: INF deployments in Europe and successive large increases in the U.S. military budget; Afghanistan, Grenada, and the emergence of the "Reagan Doctrine," which put new pressure on Soviet clients in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; Moscow's exclusion from Middle East diplomacy, and the humiliation of Soviet-made weapons in the Lebanon war of 1982; the Solidarity challenge in Poland; robust Chinese economic growth against a background of continuing Sino-Soviet hostility. And all this bad news before even mentioning the Strategic Defense Initiative, which threatened a new round of military competition and highlighted Soviet technological inferiority. Eduard Shevardnadze summed up the situa-

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tion as follows: Soviet foreign policy had been "out of touch with the fundamental vital interests of the country."[1]

Merely to recite this list of Soviet setbacks is to underscore the West's role in discrediting the policy of Gorbachev's predecessors. Naturally, Georgi Arbatov, in his recent memoirs, describes as "absolute nonsense" the idea that Western toughness "helped alter Soviet policy and demonstrate the futility of its warlike course," but there is no need to take this view too seriously. After all, Soviet policy was not inherently "futile"; it was made so by the strong external opposition it produced. Had there been no such opposition, the warnings of experts like Arbatov, about how the United States would respond to this or that action, would have had no credibility.[2] Similarly, had there been successes to balance the failures of Soviet policy—had, for example, the Afghan operation gone relatively smoothly, with the West quietly ceding Moscow a sphere of influence; or had NATO's INF policy unraveled in the face of mounting European street protests—it would have been harder for Gorbachev and his colleagues to make a comprehensive critique of past policy. Instead of proposing a completely new approach to dealing with the outside world—what they grandly called "new thinking" —they would have been much more likely to propose *ad hoc* adjustments of specific policies.

Soviet policy was particularly vulnerable because it had made a mess everywhere. This argument, if correct, implies that the unrelenting approach of the Reagan administration was probably more effective than a better balanced Western policy—beat up the Soviets here, conciliate them there—would have been. By "overdoing it," the United States gave extra credibility to individual policies that might have lacked real force on their own. This is particularly true of SDI, which raised the specter of vast increases in Soviet military spending. Although its partisans sometimes talk as though SDI brought down the Soviet regime all by itself, it was always a somewhat hypothetical threat, based on military systems that had been neither developed nor tested nor deployed. What made it impossible to laugh off SDI was the Reagan record as a whole.

The Brezhnev regime had come into being in 1964 on a platform that elevated stability over Khrushchevian impulsiveness. By the early 1980s, however, this stability became outright petrification: policy was hard to change without the pressure of a crisis. Confrontational Western policies provided that pressure. There was, of course, nothing automatic about the Soviet response to crisis, and a tightening-up of the system was at the very least conceivable. Hawks on both sides of the struggle, said some commentators, had to protect their common interest in keeping the conflict going. Arbatov has gone so far as to say that U.S. policy in the early 1980s created "further obstacles on the road to reform" and almost led to a "restoration of Stalinism."

There is no doubt that the Soviet propaganda apparatus answered the policies of the Reagan administration with some of the most blood-curdling invective of the Cold War, but Stalinist rhetoric can hardly be treated as proof of Stalinist politics. Arbatov himself observes that the military-industrial complex had "escaped control" a full decade earlier, thereby refuting his own claim that U.S. policy was responsible for the "Frankenstein monster" of Soviet militarism in the first half

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[1]Many academic writings completely ignore the impact of failure on the Soviet leadership's negative reading of their situation. See Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change" (*International Security*, Winter 1991-2), a purportedly comprehensive survey that never even mentions the INF defeat.

[2]*The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p. 321. Arbatov boasts about the astute predictions he allegedly made to his superiors, but he doesn't want to give the U.S. any credit for confirming them in practice.

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of the 1980s. On balance, the tensions of this period seem to have *weakened* those within the Soviet leadership who argued that the best response to crisis was more of the same. It should be remembered that the notorious Marshal Ogarkov, the loudest advocate within the military of running harder to keep up with the West, was ousted even before Gorbachev came to power.[3]

The rigidity of the Soviet system made it more likely that pressure would lead to crisis. In recalling this period for the Hoover Oral History Project, two members of the Politburo (both of them Gorbachev allies) have described the internal debate about how to respond to SDI. The commitment of resources needed to run the arms race at all was already crushing, and in the first phase of Gorbachev's tenure—when he proposed to fix the economy through resource re-allocation rather than radical reform—the idea of shifting *more* resources to the military was simply not viable. Yet the high command refused to consider "quick-fix" responses to the SDI threat. Their determination to have a full-blown strategic defense of their own dramatized the internal price of the arms race and made clear the need to shake the system up.

Gorbachev, of course, presented his program somewhat differently. In December 1984, three full months before he took over as general secretary, he assured Party conservatives that his goal was to guarantee that the Soviet Union entered the twenty-first century "in a manner worthy of a great power." For many, this statement became a kind of proof that, from the very beginning, perestroika was meant to serve geopolitical aims. There is little reason to doubt that the general staff and captains of industry saw it this way, but the picture is far less clear when it comes to Gorbachev himself. He may have spoken the language of the military establishment so as to neutralize it politically. (He had the help of in-house propagandists: as late as 1990, when reforms were already taking a severe toll on Soviet power, military billboards continued to proclaim: "The main goal of perestroika is to strengthen military readiness!") That Gorbachev could credibly claim to be serving military goals testifies again to the impact of a hostile international environment. By showing that past policies had led nowhere, Western toughness altered the internal power balance of Soviet politics in favor of fundamental change.

The Soft Eighties

ALTHOUGH HE WAS the beneficiary of international tensions, Gorbachev had to show that he could do better than his predecessors, lest the power balance turn against him again. As he put the point to *Time*'s interviewers shortly after he took power, he needed a calm international environment to put his reformist plans into practice. This remark was scorned by many as a clever appeal for a time-out in the East-West competition, but it accurately described the logic of Gorbachev's position. He got convincing support, moreover, from no less than Andrei Sakharov, who—though he had publicly supported U.S. deployment of the MX while Yuri Andropov was in power—argued that the United States needed a very different approach for dealing with Gorbachev. In the early Reagan years, Sakharov had stunned Western arms controllers by making the heretical suggestion that an arms race (by which he meant a U.S. build-up) could help prevent nuclear war. Now he worried that, if the race continued, "the process of democratization and liberalization will stop."[4]

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[3]The best account is Jeremy Azrael, *The Soviet Civilian Leadership and the Military High Command, 1976-1986* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1987).

[4]For Sakharov's two statements, see "The Danger of Thermonuclear War," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1983), and "Of Arms and Reforms," *Time*, March 16, 1987.

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In the first half of the 1980s, then, Western contentiousness provided the right backdrop for Soviet re-thinking. By contrast, the congeniality of the second half of the decade created a setting in which reforms steadily expanded and eventually became uncontrollable. The impact of this detente, it should be added, did not derive from its concrete achievements, which were rather meager. Soviet-American relations had never been so warm, but in contrast to the detente of the early 1970s few agreements were reached, there was no mutual acceptance of the status quo, and the idea of resolving disputes by splitting differences never took hold. In fact, Western demands tended, if anything, to escalate, and the criteria for believing perestroika to be "serious" grew stricter. In June 1987 Reagan, never having talked much about the Berlin wall, suddenly called on Gorbachev to tear it down. The West Germans, who had long since learned to live with East Germany, began to question the division of Europe. And in 1989, acceptance of East European revolution became the test Gorbachev had to pass to preserve good relations with the West.

These adverse developments had little impact on Gorbachev's internal position and policies, for with every passing year the course of reform became steadily less dependent on external conditions—and certainly less dependent on individual Western actions. It makes little sense, for example, to argue that perestroika might have been aborted by the conclusion of a strategic arms reduction treaty in 1987. The same is true of the idea that there was a causal link between the failure to sign an arms treaty at the Moscow summit in June 1988 and Gorbachev's turn to radical political reform (that is, elections) in July.[5] Such notions confuse Gorbachev's very strong general interest in lower international tensions with his much weaker specific interest in this or that agreement. He turned to elections in the summer of 1988 because he didn't have a solid majority in the Central Committee of the party. No START treaty, no matter how skewed in his favor, would have given him such a majority.

The detente of the late 1980s—marked by more or less annual declarations that the Cold War was now really, finally, conclusively, irreversibly over (such announcements have continued into the 1990s)—had highly uneven effects in East and West. Although Soviet spokesmen announced with malicious glee that the West was being robbed of the "enemy image" on which its anti-Soviet policies had allegedly been based, Soviet decision-making itself was far more thoroughly transformed. Struggle against the Western world, now off its head with admiration for Gorbachev, simply could no longer be an organizing principle of society. Similarly, Gorbachev's popularity in the West may have had less impact on Western policy than on his own vanity. Did "Gorbomania" encourage him to ignore the doubts of fellow Politburo members, taking risks with the stability of the Soviet system that a less flamboyant leader, his head not turned by global celebrity, would have instantly recognized as imprudent?[6]

The hard international environment of the early 1980s obliged the Soviet leadership to consider change, but tough Western policies alone could not finish the job. Reagan, Thatcher, Bush, and the other Western leaders who dealt with Gorbachev had only limited leverage over him. What they did, in effect, was hand him a gun and suggest that he do the honorable thing. As is often true of such situations, the victim-to-be is more likely to accept the advice if it is offered in the gentlest possible way and if he concludes that his

[5]For both interpretations, see Patrick Glynn, *Closing Pandora's Box: Arms Races, Arms Control, and the History of the Cold War* (New York: New Republic Books, 1992).

[6]I owe this insight into Gorbachev's psychology to Fritz Ermarth; as will be argued below, it can be applied to Brezhnev as well.

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friends, family, and colleagues will in the end think better of him for going through with it. For Soviet communism, the international environment of the late 1980s was a relaxed setting in which, after much anguished reflection, to turn the gun on itself.

The Seventies: Bait and Switch

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV was clearly helped to do his duty by the reduction of East-West tensions. Is there a similar case to be made for the much-maligned detente of the 1970s? Was it then that the Soviet regime, welcomed at last into international society, began to be undermined?

The difficulty of making such an argument at all plausible is suggested by this basic difference between the two periods: unlike the detente of the 1980s, that of the 1970s amounted to the realization of *all major Soviet military and diplomatic desiderata*. Western governments, which once stirred public fears of Soviet power, now accepted strategic nuclear parity. Having once railed against the division of Europe, they now recognized the least legitimate state of the Warsaw Pact, East Germany. Having complained of Soviet "subversion" throughout the Third World, they now sought Moscow's help when war broke out in the Middle East. And having restricted and regulated East-West trade, they now raced to subsidize it. These successes loomed large in the Soviet leadership's advertisements for itself. "Lasting peace, just peace in the world, and the name of Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev are inseparable"—this was one of the hallmark boasts of what Gorbachev and his allies later labeled "the era of stagnation."

The Brezhnev era's stagnation was real enough, and for many in the Soviet elite—those, say, able to travel abroad for the first time—detente definitely made the inadequacies of communism more vivid and painful. But even as the system's rot became more apparent to those who were benefiting from it most, the larger political impact of detente was to delay the crisis that would put real reform on the agenda. Even Arbatov, certainly no critic of detente, argues that the economic ties with the West that developed in the 1970s made it easier for the Soviet elite to preserve the system as it was:

> Why bother developing your science and technology when you can order entire plants from abroad? Who needs to find radical solutions to the food problem when it's so easy to buy tens of millions of tons of grain, and no small amounts of meat, butter, and other products from America, Canada and West Europe? Who needs to salvage the dreadfully backward construction industry when there are Finnish, Yugoslav, or Swedish construction companies to build or renovate the most important sites, when you can import the materials in shortest supply—the plumbing and the fixtures from West Germany, the wallpaper and the furniture from other Western countries?[7]

According to Brezhnev, detente promoted the consolidation of socialism, and he was right. It was central to the Soviet regime's somewhat half-hearted attempt at "conservative modernization"—gradual economic and social adjustments to the modern world, without political revolution. For such a strategy of authoritarian reform to succeed over the long term, however, the mediocre, senescent men running the Soviet system in the 1970s had to be able to turn it over to like-minded younger leaders in something approximating good working order. Instead, Brezhnev and his colleagues handed it over in circumstances approaching crisis. Had they been prepared to adjust Soviet foreign policy to preserve good relations with the

[7]Arbatov, p. 215. In this passage, Arbatov is describing the insidious impact of Soviet energy exports, but his argument has a wider relevance.

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West, their successors would have been able to pursue conservative modernization with a far better chance of success—that is, with international support. Mikhail Gorbachev was able to recreate that support in the late 1980s, but by that time he had been led to seek more radical cures for what was wrong with the system. The strategy of his predecessors he derided as an attempt to "go forward without changing anything." Seen in this way, the breathing space created by detente may have made reform, when it finally began, less likely to succeed—and more likely to become revolution.

That the Brezhnev leadership made so few concessions to the need for detente is proof of how poorly its members understood the real interests of the Soviet state. No harm of any kind would have come to them by deciding not to build the SS-20 missile force against Western Europe, or deciding not to intervene in Afghanistan. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that a leadership so ignorant of its own interests harmed itself even when it did make a concession to East-West amity, as it did in agreeing to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. By assuming the obligations contained in "basket three" of the Act, the Soviet Union internationalized the issue of human rights. On the home front, Soviet dissidents now claimed that they were only "monitoring" implementation of the country's diplomatic commitments. Likewise, foreign governments now denied—indignantly, if implausibly—that, in paying attention to this issue, they were interfering in Soviet internal affairs. The result was a steady sharpening of the international focus on human-rights practices, not only in the Soviet Union but in its East European dependencies as well. Just how important Eastern Europe's growing anticommunist activism was became clear more than a decade later, when Gorbachev's reforms metastasized into the revolutions of 1989. From that moment onward, events in the Soviet Union itself raced forward at a steadily faster pace.

The significance of the Helsinki Final Act should not be treated too mechanically. It did not create an internal opposition where none existed. The Human Rights Committee, the first openly dissident group to operate in the Soviet Union, had been founded by Andrei Sakharov and others as early as 1970. Nor did the Final Act create a truly durable counterweight to the Soviet state. Under continuing attack by the KGB, the last of the Helsinki monitoring groups actually disbanded in 1982, well before perestroika. And yet the creation of an international human rights test of political respectability had a fundamental impact: the Soviet empire became increasingly illegitimate.[8] By 1988 Shevardnadze argued openly what no previous Soviet foreign minister could even have thought: that the world community's standards could not be ignored, that living up to them was essential to Soviet "self-respect."

Why, then, did Brezhnev sign a document designed to legitimize pressure on the Soviet regime? The main reason was surely that the Final Act was a package deal, and other parts of the package—recognition of postwar European borders (and thus of the permanent division of Germany), plus increased trade—were simply too good to turn down. In retrospect, this seems like a huge mistake, but many opponents of the Soviet regime guessed wrong too. At the time, Solzhenitsyn referred to Helsinki "the funeral of Eastern Europe." The crucial point is that both Brezhnev and Solzhenitsyn were wrong for the same reason. They believed detente was permanent, and that the Soviet Union would pay no real price for ignoring its human rights commitments. Western policy confounded them both. Detente disappeared, but the Helsinki

[8]Michael Scammell makes a similar argument (crediting Jimmy Carter rather than Helsinki) in "The Prophet and the Wilderness: How the idea of human rights crippled communism," *The New Republic*, February 25, 1991.

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Final Act left the Soviet Union permanently in the dock.

Leonid Brezhnev hoped to blunt domestic change; Mikhail Gorbachev, to quicken it. Despite this basic difference, each found that his goal was served by detente. Moreover, better East-West relations led each in a direction that he would never have taken if relations had stayed bad. There is perhaps a still deeper similarity between the two men, strangely enough at the level of personal psychology. Both appear to have been swayed by vanity as well as by a calculus of political risks and rewards.[9] The Soviet system, it seems, was no better than the West at producing leaders able to withstand the corrupting personal effects of being praised as a Great Peacemaker.

The Inconsistent Inherit the Earth

WHEN IT COMES to defining and defending their interests in the world, the Western democracies have such a poor reputation that it may seem absurd to discuss at length whether they deserve any credit for the most important international event of our time. Don't we all know that democracies have a short diplomatic attention span, awaken late to danger, alternately demonize and deify their adversaries, betray their friends and allies (sometimes consciously, sometimes not), let narrow constituencies and special interest groups dictate national policy, are too queasy about using force except *in extremis*, and can't negotiate their way out of a paper bag? And isn't America the outstanding example of such faults?

Overdrawn as this indictment obviously is, what is wrong with it is not simply that it scants the underlying continuity of U.S. policy over many decades. Equally important is the failure to see that erratic policy can sometimes be very effective. The changeability—first one thing, then the other—that critics saw as a weakness actually made good use of American strengths and highlighted Soviet rigidity.

The 1970s and 1980s provided countless examples of this pattern. As long as Soviet-American relations were improving, the issue of human rights held few dangers for Moscow, and it seemed safe to give a little ground on the subject, the better to lock in detente. But what made sense while the West was pursuing a soft line became extremely damaging later. From the Soviet point of view, the episode proved to be a kind of diplomatic sting operation.

The policy shifts of the 1980s—deepening hostility, followed by another detente—were equally hard on the Soviet system. Unsure of how to respond to the unexpected anti-Sovietism of the Reagan administration, Brezhnev and his colleagues sought to show the Americans where confrontation might lead. From the resulting atmosphere of crisis that they created, Soviet policy emerged discredited, and Mikhail Gorbachev emerged with a stronger hand to experiment with Soviet institutions. (Ronald Reagan, by contrast, emerged unscathed, merrily offering another seeming trick—to share SDI technology.)

The Soviet Union's ability to conduct the military rivalry with the West depended on stable rules of the game.[10] A similar point

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[9]Brezhnev and Gorbachev both obviously loved the adulation they received at summit meetings, but the former's interest in what the West could do for him had a much pettier side too. See Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), for Brezhnev's worries, before the 1973 summit, about whether his accommodations in the U.S. would be grand enough.

[10]Paul Kennedy makes this point: "Russia has always enjoyed its greatest military advantage vis-à-vis the West when the pace of weapons technology has slowed down enough to allow a standardization of equipment and thus of fighting units and tactics...Whenever an upward spiral in weapons technology has placed an emphasis upon quality rather than quantity, however, the Russian advantage has diminished." *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).

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can be made about economic relations. A grain embargo imposed one year might be lifted the next, and a pipeline embargo might take its place the year after that. What were Soviet planners to do? As for energy exports, the high prices of the 1970s nowhere so distorted national policy as they did in the Soviet Union, and the low prices of the 1980s were nowhere so great a shock.

It is possible that the West's disorderly mix of policies did more to destabilize the Soviet Union than any single line of policy, consistently applied, would have been able to do. Built to be rigid, the Soviet system craved predictability. The democracies would not—could not—provide it. Exasperatingly changeable, they created a world in which totalitarianism was increasingly at a disadvantage.

Credit Where It's Due

GEORGE KENNAN, who has spent half his life lamenting the way lesser men coarsen and cheapen his ideas, took to the *New York Times* op-ed page last October to explain that Western pressure did not contribute to the collapse of communism. To think otherwise, said the man who first made himself famous by thinking otherwise, was "simply childish."

Kennan was annoyed that the issue had become so entangled in partisan politics. (His title was, "The GOP Won the Cold War? Ridiculous.") There is no doubt that exaggerating Western influence has its costs. It obscures the internal forces that powered the anticommunist revolution and makes the future of Russian democracy look more precarious than it actually is. Claiming too much for Reagan also infuriates Gorbachevites and leads them to distort their own version of the story, making it harder for anyone to learn the truth.

Yet even as we reproach those who exaggerate Western influence for partisan reasons, it should be said that many who *under*state it are also moved by partisanship and that they obscure the most important lessons to be learned from the story. Communism is ready for burial, but the lessons of our struggle with it should be kept alive. We need to know—because this is what the record shows—that we can in fact influence the internal affairs of rival states, even large and seemingly secure ones. East-West relations in the 1970s and 1980s also underscore the differences between a detente that realizes the other side's goals and one that realizes ours. Finally, we should see that the difference between incremental and radical improvement can sometimes be made by "overdoing it"—by getting separate elements of policy to reinforce each other, not cancel each other out.

These conclusions have an obvious bearing on issues that will outlive the Cold War. Denying them—out of petty partisanship, no less—will only make it harder to conduct other struggles with the same success. □

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The Economic Fallacy

Vladimir Kontorovich

Whatever happens, it always appears that that was foreseen and decreed.
-Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

A HIGHLY VISIBLE economic crisis gripped the Soviet Union during the last three years of its existence. Western reporting from Moscow told stories of long lines, empty shelves, and fear of starvation. Many official decrees designed to save the economy were issued in rapid succession. Intellectuals openly attacked the theory and practice of central planning.

All this has supported the subsequent conclusion that the collapse of the Soviet system was brought about by economic failure. The Soviet economy had long been wasteful, unresponsive to consumer demand, and sluggish in adopting new technology. The resources that fueled the nation's expansion were being exhausted. Only a few years ago, of course, such a characterization would have been considered unbalanced, if not blatantly biased. Now, looking back from the ruins of the USSR, it seems a fair summary of the progressive buildup to the inevitable finale,[1] and the failure of Sovietologists in the West to recognize such unmistakable signs of the coming collapse seems seriously delinquent.

This "economic" explanation of the collapse, however, is, at best, incomplete. Poor economic performance is commonplace in the world, while the peacetime collapse of a political system is quite rare. Instead of disintegrating under the weight of economic problems, societies find ways of mitigating some of them and learning to live with others. An obvious example of this is how capitalist societies have historically adapted to periodic declines in production, paralleled by increasing unemployment.

Poor economic performance alone cannot directly and immediately destroy a political system. That requires political action—an uprising, a failed reform, an invasion, or some similar disruption. An economic explanation of the collapse must connect causally the political actions which destroyed the Soviet system to their economic context. Such a connection is far from self-evident.

Economic failure alone, then, cannot explain the Soviet collapse, unless that explanation incorporates answers to two questions: What were the serious economic problems with which the Soviet system learned to live? How, if at all, were the political developments that destroyed the system related to the underlying economic circumstances?

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[1]See, for example, a series of articles in *Voprosy ekonomiki*, nos. 4-6, 1992.

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Was It Always So Inefficient?

THE CORE LEGITIMATION of Soviet rule was provided by the Marxist thesis that public ownership of the means of production, and the unified direction of production toward public objectives, would make a socialist economy more efficient than a capitalist one, with its anarchic pursuit of private gain. The regime was understandably eager to supply data supporting this thesis. Of course, the Soviet Union was always poorer and less efficient than the developed capitalist countries, a condition it inherited from the Russian Empire. The superior efficiency of the socialist economic system was to be demonstrated by the country's fast growth. A full-fledged system of central planning was introduced under Stalin in the late 1920s and early 1930, and for several decades appeared to be justifying its architects' expectations.

In the West, competing theoretical arguments for and against the superior efficiency of socialism were being advanced by leading economists such as Schumpeter and Hayek well into the 1940s. By the 1950s, the accumulating empirical evidence on the Soviet economy started casting doubts on both the official claims of success and theoretical arguments for the superiority of central planning. Detailed studies of the operation of enterprises, central planning, and the supply system revealed grossly inefficient practices.[2] Western recalculations of the official Soviet growth rates found them to be significantly lower than reported.[3]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Abram Bergson used these calculations to analyze the sources of growth.[4] Bergson determined the shares of the GNP growth rate contributed respectively by the growth of labor, capital, and productivity. The growth of the Soviet economy turned out to be overly dependent on ever-increasing inputs of capital and labor, compared to those required in capitalist economies. The third source of growth, increases in efficiency, was found to be weak compared to the capitalist countries. This was the most conclusive evidence available of the inferior efficiency of the Soviet economy and was generally accepted by economists studying the USSR.

Even so, low levels of efficiency and the comparatively slow rate of its improvement did not in themselves presage the economy's downfall. The Soviet economy lived—and even flourished—for decades with these conditions. At the time when the evidence of the Soviet economy's inefficiency was being uncovered, it was growing at a healthy pace. The CIA estimated annual GNP growth at 5.8 percent in 1956-60, while according to Gregory Khanin national income was growing at 7.2 percent a year in the 1950s. Though modest compared to capitalist

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[2]See, for example, David Granick, *The Red Executive* (New York: Columbia University Press: 1954), and Aleck Nove, "The Problem of 'Success Indicators' in Soviet Industry," *Economica*, February 1958.

[3]See Abram Bergson, *The Real National Income of Soviet Russia since 1928* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961). The Bergson methodology, anchored in neoclassical economics, was used by the CIA to produce regular estimates of Soviet growth, which were consistently lower than the official ones issued in Moscow. The estimates of the Bergson school were higher than the competing ones of Naum Jasny and G. W. Nutter. The heated debate about the appropriate methods of estimation subsided in the 1960s with the general acceptance of Bergson's approach, but reemerged in the 1980s, with some Soviet authors, most notably Gregory Khanin, producing estimates of the Soviet growth lower than those of the CIA. In what follows, I shall use CIA estimates, as well as the alternative estimates of Khanin.

[4]Bergson, *Planning and Productivity under Soviet Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968) and *Productivity and the Social System—the USSR and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

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economies at the same level of development, these growth rates were higher than those of the richest economies in the same period. In other words, the Soviet economy was closing the gap between itself and the mature capitalist states of the West.

After the late 1950s, Soviet growth rates slowly declined for two decades. One reason for this trend was a change in management styles, from that of Stalin to that of Brezhnev. Systematic terror ended and the rulers of the country became increasingly more forgiving of the failures of their employees at all levels—ministers, plant managers, and workers. The latter responded by relaxing their efforts. Central planners experienced ever greater difficulties in directing a growing economy. The growing burden of military expenditures and the exhaustion of natural resources were among the other likely causes of declining growth rates.

The slowdown was strikingly steady and persistent. Soviet industrial growth rates in the period 1951-80 show little deviation from the downward trend. Such a stable process should have been easy to recognize and extrapolate, but Gregory Khanin was the only one who did so, in his samizdat study circulated in the mid-1970s. By the late 1960s, Western economists had noted the slowdown and were looking into its causes; but those concerned to forecast the future performance of the Soviet economy seemed oblivious to the possibility that the trend would continue. In the late 1970s, two large-scale econometric models were used for making regular predictions, and a number of forecasts were also derived by other methods. Most of them predicted a continuation of the rates of growth achieved in the early 1970s, ignoring the actual downward trend. All the forecasts during this period were less accurate than the naive extension of a straight line plotted through the rates of growth of the immediate past. The record low rates of growth of 1979-82 (calculated by the CIA to be 1.4 percent annually) turned out to be "the little surprise" which predated the big one by a decade.

It is understandable that economists were uneasy about extrapolating such a simple trend over a long period of time. The intuition developed in studying capitalist economies led to the expectation that there would inevitably be a corrective reaction that would reverse the trend. But the Soviet economy lacked a mechanism of self-correction. Any change in course could only come from the top leadership, and during Brezhnev's long and stagnant rule, the slowdown trend remained uninterrupted.

As a result the country was no longer "catching up with the West." This would have been a serious blow to the self-confidence of the party's top echelon, had they perceived it at the time. Public admission of the permanent laggard status would have created ideological difficulties, but—it must be emphasized again—would not in itself have precipitated the collapse of the system. At any period, there are a number of poorer economies that are not catching up with the leaders, but their governments do not all collapse. Convergence is most apparent among the more developed countries, but even there, raw data show no convergence in income per capita since 1973. In 1980-88, most West European countries, already lagging behind the United States in income per capita, also experienced a slower growth of this indicator than did the American economy. The gap between these countries and the world leader was increasing, without causing appreciable political instability. Great Britain in the last hundred years provides the best evidence that political stability is compatible with increasing economic lag. What matters is whether the absolute level of income in the country keeps increasing.

In the USSR in 1979-82 it probably was not. While the CIA estimated an annual GNP growth of 1.4 percent for this period (still higher than the 0.8 percent annual rate of population increase), Khanin saw a 2 percent annual decline in 1981-82. The Politburo did not have the benefit of Khanin's estimates, of course. They used the official ones, which

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showed a national income growth rate of 3.2 percent per year, hardly a cause for alarm.[5] However, it is likely that they were paying attention to the output of selected products measured in physical terms. Tons of steel, coal and petroleum, ton-kilometers of freight traffic, the number of units of various types of machinery, and similar magnitudes were at the heart of the central planning. The rulers must have been aware that the output of most of these products was declining or stagnant in 1979-82, a situation they would not want continued for a long time.

Alternative Strategies

LENIN, THE FOUNDER of the Soviet state, laid it down in his 1917 work *The State and Revolution* that the new state's economy should be organized "like one factory." A factory's performance crucially depends on the manager's personality, and so does that of a centrally planned economy.[6] In the final years of the Soviet "factory," four different managers ran it, each according to his lights.

A "business as usual" strategy was pursued by Brezhnev through 1982, and by Chernenko in 1984-85. There were no political challenges to this course. The country was at the height of its military power, enjoying its newly acquired "strategic parity." Dissidents were suppressed and the population subdued. The fact that this strategy ended only with the general secretary's natural death suggests that it could not be—or, at least, was not—challenged from within the ruling elite. "Business as usual" was all the more feasible because, in the short run, the economy was set for a rebound. The contraction of 1979-82 was only in part caused by the long-run growth slowdown. Other causes included a series of poor harvests and a dip in industrial capacity utilization. The latter was part of the investment cycle, in which the errors of planners in allocating investment created disproportions between capacities in technologically related sectors. Once planners started correcting the disproportions, capacity utilization and output would turn up. Again, to the degree that poor harvests were due to bad weather, they too would not have lasted. A period of growth would have followed, and official growth rates, positive in any case, would have shot up. The party could have claimed another victory.

The commonly held view nowadays is that such an improvement could not have lasted long, and that the same trends which brought about the growth slowdown would have reasserted themselves, dragging the economy back into stagnation or worse. (By contrast, at the time only a minority of Sovietologists recognized that the Soviet economy was in a serious condition. Witness the reviews of Marshall Goldman's *USSR in Crisis*.)[7] Yet, some recent research suggests that even the pre-Andropov economy may have had some life left in it. A rapid improvement in grain yields occurred in 1981-86: adjusted for weather fluctuations, they were growing by 3.4 percent annually, compared to 1.9 percent in 1965-80. This spurt of growth was apparently due to the adoption of new agrotechnology in 1981. Could it be that Brezhnev's much-ridiculed "Food Program" actually bore some fruit?

The second strategy of the 1980s, pursued by Andropov, addressed the root cause of growth slowdown: the degeneration of the command system. Under the slogan of "tightening discipline," some of the ministers in charge of poorly performing sectors were replaced. Sanctions for failure were

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[5]See Gregory Khanin's "Economic Growth in the 1980s" in Ellman and Kontorovich, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Economic System* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[6]See eloquent argument to this effect in Phillip Hanson's *From Stagnation to Catastroika: Commentaries on the Soviet Economy, 1983-1991*, The Washington Papers/155 (New York: Praeger, 1992), pp. 37-38.

[7]Marshall I. Goldman, *USSR in Crisis: The Failure of an Economic System* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1983).

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increased. This simple strategy was actively pursued for only a short period, from October 1982 to the summer of 1983, after which a terminally ill Andropov was unable to perform his duties. It caused growth to rebound in a matter of months and provided the momentum that carried the Soviet economy through the 1980s.

In Khanin's estimate, the national income growth rate swung from -2 percent a year in 1981-82 to 1.8 percent in 1983-88. The official industrial production growth rate gained one percentage point in 1983-85 compared with 1981-82. Income per capita was growing in 1983-88 at an annual rate of 0.8 percent (Khanin, national income) or 1.2 percent (CIA, gross national product). The CIA estimated total factor productivity growth to be very slow, but this was the result of a tragicomic error in handling Soviet data on fixed capital. Of course, the official Soviet data by which the rulers navigated presented an even better picture. To the best of our knowledge, the majority of the population was satisfied with its economic situation.

This was the state of the economy when Gorbachev assumed power. Just four years later, the economy was sinking into a profound recession, amid accelerating inflation and worsening shortages of consumer goods.

Gorbachev's initial economic policies were characterized by strong push, poor preparation, and rapid succession—a "Napoleonic preference for action" in Phillip Hanson's words. They were being reversed, cancelled or superseded within a year or two of their introduction. In his first two or three years in office Gorbachev pursued what would come to be derisively called the "command-administrative" course. His speeches stressed discipline, and extensive personnel changes in the top echelons of the hierarchy gave some credibility to that rhetoric.

The first major strategy announced by the new general secretary was the "acceleration" of economic growth, to be achieved by a massive shift of investment into the machine-building sector. This had been a standard policy for a centrally planned economy since Stalin's industrialization. It was based on the belief that the government could identify "the leading link" that would pull up the rest of the economy, and force resources to flow to the sector so designated. The machine-building sector was also commanded to be more innovative, to increase the share of new products in its output to precisely prescribed levels, by a series of steps. A state quality control system, transplanted from the military sector in January 1987, subordinated quality control personnel at the manufacturing plants to the State Committee for Standards, instead of to the plant managers. This made quality inspectors more willing to turn down substandard products.

Command policies are blunt but frequently effective tools, with strong side effects. Abrupt shifts of investment have long been known to aggravate sectoral imbalances and result, at least temporarily, in slower growth. The strategy of acceleration did just that, while pushing up inflation. Its expected benefits, in the form of a stronger machine-building sector, never materialized because the government switched strategies midway. The anti-alcohol campaign improved occupational safety and reduced street crime, while adding to the budget deficit and thus accelerating inflation. Barely two years after its adoption, the command strategy was abandoned, with the rulers unleashing increasingly vehement attacks on the ideology underlying it. In 1987, an alternative strategy of "radical economic reform" was announced.

Reform: Beware the Granted Wish

REFORM WAS the third strategy for dealing with the Soviet economy that was tried within the space of a few years. It should be understood that, far from being a desperate response to a crisis, economic reform was part of the everyday functioning of the Soviet system. Central planning itself was created in the blizzard of reforms in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Having designed

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the economy from scratch, the rulers retained the exclusive right to organizational changes. Institutions could not simply evolve with the changing economy; any change had to be introduced as a reform from above. Reforming the economy was also in tune with the official ideology: as technological change transformed "productive forces," economic reform was to adjust "relations of production" accordingly.

Reforms reflected confidence in the strength of the system and its potential for improvement, and the revealing expression "further perfecting" was a standard part of reform decree titles. Some of the most sweeping economic reforms had been announced in the late 1950s, the golden age of Soviet society. This was the era of Sputnik, when national income grew by more than 7 percent a year. In the 1970s, when economic performance was much weaker than in the 1950s, reforms, though numerous, were timid and inconsequential. One often-mentioned reason for this was Brezhnev's apparent satisfaction with the status quo. Another was the rulers' view, supported by reference to the Czechoslovak events of 1968, that the system was so fragile that it could be shattered by serious reforms.

An important class of reforms consisted in grafting market elements onto a centrally planned economy. This was first tried in Eastern Europe in the late 1950s, and in the USSR in 1965. Market-inspired changes reduced the number of commands given to the producers and made them less detailed. The importance of profit and other monetary indicators was stressed, and that of output targets in physical terms was downgraded. These reforms weakened central planning without actually introducing a market environment, for elements of the market did not work in an entirely alien system, or worked in perverse ways. Economic performance suffered, and reforms had to be reversed or sidetracked.

Market-oriented reform held special fascination for most Western Sovietologists. To them it represented rationality and economic efficiency, evolutionary change, and a correlate of political liberalization. It was both the profession's prescription for solving the USSR's economic problems and also its prediction of the likely future. The past failures of such reforms were attributed to bureaucratic resistance. Reform was seen as a feasible and even unavoidable—though politically difficult—step. Thus most Sovietologists cheered when Gorbachev took it.

There were elements of market-style changes even during the "command" period of Gorbachev's reign. In 1986 there was a failed attempt to give farm managers discretion in disposing of output that exceeded some firm target. In 1983, Andropov initiated a "large-scale economic experiment" in industry, consisting of organizational changes with a decentralizing flavor. They were proven worthless by several years of testing. In 1987, Gorbachev enacted these changes on an economy-wide basis.

Gorbachev's own "radical" reform was announced in 1987 and introduced as of January 1, 1988. The blueprint of reform was riddled with inconsistencies. The announced aims of reform were to increase the independence of the enterprise managers—and, at the same time, to strengthen central control over the economy. While the rhetoric of reform deplored the command principle, the legislation preserved it in a poorly disguised form. Obligatory output targets were abolished, but the state reserved the right to order some products, these orders being binding for the enterprises and covering most of their output. The state renounced liability for the debts of the enterprise; yet if the enterprise ran losses, the ministry had to pick up the tab. The ministry could not tell enterprises what to do, but was held responsible for all the aspects of enterprise activity. The Law of the Enterprise, aimed at giving managers broad discretion, stipulated managerial duties down to such petty details as two-shift operation and encouraging cultivation of kitchen garden plots by the employees. It could not work.

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Three elements of reform proved to be the most destructive: managerial discretion over the output in excess of the state order, flexibility in wage and price setting, and strong incentives to earn above planned profit. Taken together, they frequently allowed the managers to raise prices of their products and the wages of their employees while cutting output.

The reform gave another boost to inflation, already picking up due to the "acceleration" program and the budgetary consequences of the anti-alcohol campaign. As the prices of most consumer goods and services were fixed by government, the outpouring of cash could not raise prices, as would have happened in a market economy. Instead, inflation manifested itself in worsening shortages of consumer goods, with the highly visible symbol of bare store shelves. This was to be the main source of popular disillusionment with Gorbachev's policies.

The Primacy of Politics

THE CONTRACTION of output was initially less visible. Soviet statistics estimated national income growth in 1988 at a healthy 4.4 percent and GNP at 5.5 percent, and the CIA estimated that GNP increased by 2.2 percent. Only Khanin spotted a contraction of national income in the second half of that year. In his estimate, there was no growth for the year as a whole. In the middle of 1989, top Soviet officials, including the head of Gosplan, characterized the economic situation as an emergency, and data on key sectors of the economy indicated a contraction. Yet official statistics still reported national income growth at 2.4 percent, and GNP at 3 percent. In Khanin's estimate, in 1989 national income shrunk by about 2 percent.

Wide awareness of the recession came only in 1990, when the official statistics reported drops of 2 percent in GNP and 4 percent in national income. By 1991, the official data were showing an extraordinary contraction of 15-17 percent, and in the following year the rate of decline of post-Soviet economies exceeded 20 percent.

While the economic policies in 1985-88 were destabilizing, it is hard to see how they could have led to this debacle. After all, the system survived similar policy blunders before. Examples include the first Five-Year Plan (1928-32), the massive switch of investment to chemical industry and hydroelectric power generation in the late 1950s, and the reform of 1965. In the past, the Soviet economic system contained and reversed destructive policies.

Such attempts at containment and reversal were made this time too. By the end of 1988, the top officials had realized the danger of accelerating inflation. The obvious solution would have been to freeze or roll back both the acceleration program and the "radical" reform. The whole apparatus of central planning was still in place, as were the Party, the KGB, and the other institutions needed for such a reversal. A small step in that direction was actually attempted with the program of financial stabilization in late 1988. Yet this and subsequent decrees in the same spirit achieved nothing, and economic disintegration proceeded unabated. In 1989 the government lost control of the economy.

The reason for this lies outside the economy, in the political and ideological spheres. The destruction of authority had actually started in 1986, with media criticism of managers, officials, and "bureaucrats." This was a vintage communist campaign: high pitch, unrelenting, blanket demagogy. The boss-bashing campaign was accompanied by attacks on the official ideology. Starting as mere hints, these attacks steadily gained depth and ferocity, until by 1989 there was little left unattacked. The people were told that they were being governed by the party responsible for monstrous atrocities, inflicting misery on its subjects, and leading the country to ruin.

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The regime's delegitimation was, in the final account, the main reason for the collapse of the whole system. The years 1989-91 were an experiment in dispensing with the role of ideology in the Soviet system. All the coercive institutions were still in place, but with ideology destroyed they were unsure what to do, and the people saw no reason to obey them.

That part of the ideology that dealt with the economic system was attacked by Gorbachev himself in his speeches during 1986-88. He ridiculed command methods, central planning, and state ownership, and called for unleashing the creative initiative of individuals, freed from the dead hand of state interference. Greed was proposed as an appropriate lever for this task, with payment closely tied to performance, ceilings on high earnings removed, and the safety net for the weak lowered. Translated into Western terms, many parts of Gorbachev's speeches could have been uttered by President Reagan or Prime Minister Thatcher.

Functionaries trying to make the economy work found themselves in the crossfire of these two campaigns: they were assailed for serving a bad system, and for serving it poorly. A characteristic article in *Pravda* criticized the first party secretary of the Voronezh *oblast* for his handling of the economy. It conceded that due to the first secretary's efforts, industry and agriculture in the region worked well and urban dwellers were well supplied with food. Yet the secretary was still at fault, for good performance was achieved by "command methods."

Key economic institutions were emasculated. In 1988, party committees were ordered to stop meddling in their regions' economy. The staffs of the State planning commission, and other economic committees and ministries, were cut to keep these organs from interfering with enterprises. Yet this interference and "meddling" by the Party were the only things keeping the economy together. The "radical" reform introduced in 1988 stipulated the election of enterprise managers by their employees. This blow to managerial authority proved so devastating that it had to be reversed in 1990.

The delegitimation of authority, and demoralization of those who wielded it, swiftly led to an erosion of discipline. Already in 1988, it was becoming difficult to get workers for night or weekend shifts. Relations among the suppliers and users, previously moderated by local Party committees, became more chaotic. Personnel cuts led to fewer and less coherent commands, with little else to guide the producers. One of the causes of output decline was the lack of inputs, caused in turn by the decimation of the party-state apparatus whose function it had been to make sure that producer goods moved to those who needed them.

As authority weakened, more political players were dealt into a game originally meant as one of solitaire. Instead of making the system more flexible and dynamic, each newly organized group tore at its fabric. In the late 1980s, the economy was hurt by ethnic hostilities, miners' strikes, and strike threats in other sectors, shutdowns of chemical and power generating plants by environmental protests, and the assertion of sovereignty by local governments. The international result of Moscow's weakened authority—the East European revolutions—disrupted trade within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), delivering another blow to the already reeling system.

Why Did He Do It?

SOVIET COMMUNISM was not brought down by an economic collapse. The whole system was destroyed by the words and deeds of the Politburo. Political authority, and especially the ideology that legitimized it, were the first to crumble, and they pulled the economy down with them.

Why would a ruler destroy his empire? The vacuous and self-serving memoirs of the former Politburo members provide no answer. Gorbachev's pronouncements at the

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time and the content of his economic program remain the best clues to his motives. The need for change was justified by an alarmist rhetoric with overtones of international rivalry. In one of his first speeches as general secretary, Gorbachev asserted that "the fate of the country and the place of socialism in the world" depended on reaching his economic objectives. The main feature of the 1986-90 Five-Year Plan was a massive shift of investment to the high-technology sectors, which in the Soviet economy were administratively subordinated to and provided the needs of the military. The objective was to preserve the country's hard-won "strategic parity" in the face of Reagan's rearmament, renewed assertiveness (exemplified by placing intermediate-range missiles in Europe), and commitment to a technological revolution in military hardware (symbolized by SDI and smart munitions). This interpretation was shared by Soviet intellectuals spanning the whole political spectrum, from *étatist* and imperialist Alexander Prokhanov to the liberal Westernizer Anatoly Strelianyi.

While Gorbachev's early pronouncements also stressed the need to improve consumer welfare, his Five-Year Plan was designed to take resources away from consumers and give them to producer goods sectors. Some Western observers at the time interpreted this as a policy error, suggesting that consumers would have been better served had Gorbachev focused his efforts on agriculture. A simpler explanation is that resource allocation in the Five-Year Plan, which Gorbachev personally shaped, reflected his true objectives. The rest was just talk.

Consumer welfare did acquire a higher priority in 1988-89, a change forced on Gorbachev by the manifest failure of his initial strategy. As already noted, "acceleration," "radical reform," and other policies caused inflation which devastated the consumer goods market. Only a few years before, this would not have mattered much. But in 1988-1989, the weakening of authority sharply lowered the cost of expressing dissatisfaction with the regime. The frequency and intensity of such expressions increased correspondingly, even though the standard of living, as measured by quantities of goods consumed, may have actually increased. Those new political players in the game, consumers and workers, had now to be reckoned with. Investment in high technology sectors was frozen, consumer goods production received a high priority, and military expenditures started to decline (in 1989, according to CIA, or in 1990, according to some Soviet sources). But then most of Gorbachev's original policies were reversed or abandoned around 1989: acceleration, discipline, sobriety campaign, "radical reform"—all were scrapped. New policies, aimed solely at repairing the damage done by the earlier ones, were introduced.

Unlike his claimed concern with consumer welfare, Gorbachev's original focus on technological innovation was real. This has given rise to a theory that it was the advent of radically new technologies that forced his hand. Central planning performed well in the era of mass production, of coal and steel, it is said, but, in the "information age," it had to change or wither away. When formulated in such a broad way, the "technological challenge" explanation is easy to refute. Technological progress has been a continuous process. The spread of radio, telephone, TV, and the internal combustion engine earlier in this century changed the world as radically as the computer changes it now. The Soviet response to technological change was always slow, incomplete, and uneven. In the 1980s, the Soviet economy was still struggling with the diffusion of the automobile and the telephone. It lagged even in the adoption of relatively old products and processes, and the microchip would not have been the first technological challenge unmet by the Soviet economy.

This backwardness did not prevent the USSR from being a superpower by successfully competing in one narrow sector, the military. The technology necessary for this suc-

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cess was acquired through a combination of stealing, reverse engineering, ingenious domestic adaptations and shortcuts, and massive allocation of resources. Some Western analysts detected in the Soviet generals a fear that the Soviet economy would not be able to pull it off this time. They had not been able to persuade Brezhnev to change the economy, but had more luck with Gorbachev. In this narrower version, the "technological challenge" explanation becomes a variation on that advanced above.

Andropov's Kidneys

GORBACHEV'S RESPONSE to Reagan's challenge ultimately destroyed communism. That response was just one of several viable alternatives, one that bore the unmistakable imprint of the general secretary's personality. As Gorbachev has recently acknowledged, Andropov would not have gone as far as he, Gorbachev, did.[8] We tend to confer the mantle of inevitability on accomplished facts, and arguing that what happened did not have to happen is likely to be dismissed as inventing excuses for the losing side. But, the collapse of the Soviet system was the unintended result of a small number of disastrous decisions by a few individuals. As Dmitry Shlapentokh has observed, were it not for Andropov's kidney disease, communism would still be around.

In that case, how would the Soviet economy now be performing? As long as the political system remained intact, it would have escaped the rapid disintegration that in fact occurred in 1989-91. At the same time, the economy was incapable of growing at the 4-5 percent annual rate that Gorbachev expected. The actual trajectory in between these extremes would have depended on the course chosen by the general secretary. Continued relaxation of discipline and the growth of military expenditures would have led to stagnation or a slow decline. An energetic pursuit of a discipline enforcement program and a streamlining of the command structure would have allowed the economy to grow. While this growth would have been insufficient to close the gap with developed capitalist countries, it would have sufficed to create a sense of improvement in the country. Whatever its limits, this strategy would have certainly allowed Soviet communism to outlive the inhospitable era of Reagan and Thatcher.

Both strategies—"business as usual" and discipline tightening—were actually tried earlier. There were others which we can only imagine. One could argue that the best way to preserve "strategic parity" would have been to curtail the growth of military expenditures, thereby putting a brake on Western rearmament. Resources spared by this move would have boosted the economy. Inviting Western firms into the oil and gas industries could have been another way of providing a stimulus.

Extreme dependence on the personality of a few top individuals proved to be the fatal weakness of the Soviet economy. Under even a reasonably good manager, however, the Soviet economy was a workable system. In the retrospective judgment of one writer, "the system was in general much more attuned to the economic reality than many of its critics and reformers today imagine."[9] While decidedly inferior to capitalist economies, it was compatible with modern industrial society and capable of technological change, increasing consumption, and taking on the rest of the world in military hardware. This is worth repeating because of yet another variant of the "inevitability" argument. Its unspoken premise is that what ended badly must have been going poorly all along. The collapse of the Soviet economy is thus seen as a proof of the worst things ever said about it. It is argued that low estimates of the size of the

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[8] *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, Nov. 11, 1992.

[9] V.L. Vaingort, "Stroitel'naia industriia pri perekhode k rynku," *Ekonomika i matematicheskie metody*, Vol. 28, issue 2, 1992, p. 283.

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Soviet economy in the 1950s were correct, and higher ones (like Abram Bergson's) wrong, because the economy fell apart in the 1980s.[10] But having a GNP that is only X percent of that of the United States does not cause an economy to collapse; conversely, that it collapsed does not tell us much about the relative size of the economy at any earlier period.

Inevitability implies predictability. But if Andropov's kidneys played a crucial role in the collapse of 1989-91, then Sovietologists should not be blamed for failing to predict it. Social sciences are not equipped to deal with individual behavior. There are also other limits to the prediction of social phenomena, well formulated by Joseph Schumpeter:

> Any prediction is extrascientific prophecy that attempts to do more than to diagnose observable tendencies and to state what results would be, if these tendencies should work themselves out according to their logic. In itself, this does not amount to prognosis or prediction because factors external to the chosen range of observation may intervene to prevent that consummation; because...observable tendencies, even if allowed to work themselves out, may be compatible with more than one outcome; and because existing tendencies, battling with resistances, may fail to work themselves out and may eventually 'stick' at some halfway house.[11]

By this standard, Sovietology cannot be faulted for not predicting the future. It is the field's multiple failures to "diagnose observable tendencies"—that is, to understand contemporary events—that require criticism. Getting the present right does not guarantee a correct prediction of the future, but it at least allows us to discuss possibilities intelligently. □

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[10]See for example, Martin Malia "From Under the Rubble, Where?", *Problems of Communism*, Jan-April, 1992.

[11]*Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p. 416.

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The Nature of the Beast

Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr.

"How many self-destroyers are there in Russia who fanatically direct their extraordinary capacities against themselves!"

-Gorky

IN THE SPRING of the year 546 B.C., King Croesus of Lydia was encamped with his army on the banks of the river Halys in Asia Minor. From the other shore extended the Empire of the Medes and the Persians. Driven by ambition and sheer restlessness, excited by his imagination of how different the world could be from the way it now was, Croesus wanted to invade the Persian empire. A lingering doubt, some fear of surprises, impelled him to consult an oracle first. And the oracle returned the answer that if he crossed the river, he would destroy a great empire. Thus reassured, Croesus crossed the river. But the empire he destroyed was his own.

In the last eight years Mikhail Gorbachev, driven by similar urges, launched a thrilling project of human renewal; but the empire he destroyed was his own. In these years we saw Bolshevism collect the last remnants of its once titanic energies to make itself young again, only to achieve its final extinction.

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Permanent Revolution?

WE SAW perestroika as reform, reform by Westernization. But Gorbachev said with utter sincerity, "perestroika is a revolution." In the Soviet Union, revolutionary change could only come from above. In fact, Gorbachev's was, at a minimum, the fourth imposed revolution in Soviet history: first, the October revolution, then Stalin's "Second Revolution," then Khrushchev's deStalinization, and finally perestroika. Outside the Soviet Union, the most obvious case of a revolution within the revolution is, of course, Mao Tse-tung's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, and that provides the best analogy for what Gorbachev did.

The former Politburo member and architect of perestroika, Aleksandr Yakovlev, has eloquently portrayed the constant transformations characteristic of Soviet history before Gorbachev:

> ...Marxism was not anything other, than a pseudoscientific neo-religion...subordinated to the interests and caprices of a monopolistic, absolutist power, and by it frequently and arbitrarily reshaped. Tens of times it raised up, and then trampled in the mud its own gods, prophets and apostles.[1]

[1]Aleksandr Yakovlev, *Predisloviye, obval, posleslovive* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), p. 127.

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Yakovlev is alluding to the great convulsive reversals of Soviet history: Stalin's "second revolution" and the ensuing terror reversed NEP and discredited the earlier "prophets and apostles," the Old Bolsheviks. Khrushchev's deStalinization reversed in turn that reversal, and so forth. Within these great reversals were many other abrupt changes of course. Of these the last were the sharp changes from Brezhnev's era of stagnation to Andropov's discipline campaign, from that to Gorbachev's perestroika, and finally the shift from perestroika, the "re-structuring" of the existing system, to democracy and the market—that is, the collapse of the regime, a change that differed in magnitude, though not in shape, from the others.

What Yakovlev's statement suggests, then, is something that recent Sovietology has not even contemplated: that the revolutionary spirit may have been at work continually throughout Soviet history. Perhaps the Soviet system can be compared to something run by an internal combustion engine, with its controlled explosions. These explosions set up enormous stresses. To take only a few examples: the extremist War Communism after October 1917 created a wave of peasant revolts; collectivization caused widespread famine and the resentment that made many peasants welcome the German army; deStalinization led to the Eastern European revolts and the rebellion of the intelligentsia that eventually turned into the dissident movement. But before 1985 the stresses were always contained by force and fear and by the political passivity of the population.

By the 1980s, however, these containing forces were losing their efficacy. The political passivity of the population was decreasing, as Francis Fukuyama's essay discusses, while fear was waning as the terror receded in time. Perestroika too was intended to be a controlled explosion, but the stresses it set up were too great for the weakened system to withstand.

Looking back, one is led to ask: What connection is there between the original Bolshevik revolutionary project and the instability of Soviet politics which we have just discussed? And was perestroika directly linked in any way to the earlier extremist phases of Soviet politics?

The most profound reflection on these issues known to me can be found in Hegel's interpretation of the French revolution. The incessant upheavals and institutional changes then—from the Estates-General to the National Assembly to the Convention to the Committee of Public Safety to the Directory to the Consulate to the Empire, all in a mere sixteen years—prefigured the history of the Soviet system. Hegel writes of these changes that

> ...the French revolutionaries destroyed once more the institutions which they had made themselves, since any institution whatever is antagonistic to the abstract self-consciousness of equality (i.e. what I have called the revolutionary spirit).[2]

The evolution of Gorbachev's goals—from the perfection of the regime by "acceleration" in 1985, to the final destruction of the regime in 1991—gives some support to the notion of a revolutionary spirit whose content is mainly negation. What Gorbachev seems to have wanted, more than any particular social or economic order, was a display of energy, of enthusiasm, a change in people.

But to change people is to negate the way people now are. The energy Gorbachev wanted was energy against the past and the present. With the decay of formal ideology, Gorbachev's revolutionary drive, still strong, expressed itself in essentially negative terms, without a fixed content or goal.

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[2]G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), paperback ed., Addition to ¶5, pp. 227-228.

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The Stalinist Roots of Perestroika

THE ARGUMENT OF this essay is this. One of the elements that produced the collapse of communism in the eighties was the return, in Gorbachev, of the enduring revolutionary desire to re-structure society. Operating in conditions of ideological exhaustion and economic stagnation, the resulting upheaval destroyed the system rather than reformed it. In this sense, the system, sick for many other reasons, finally died by suicide—from an overdose of "revolutionary spirit.". And, in retrospect, the original Bolshevik project contained within it the causes of its own destruction, which helps to explain the system's lifespan of only seventy-four years, almost without precedent in history.

Is there, however, any concrete historical link between perestroika and the revolutionary Soviet past? For us, perestroika was a surprise, entirely new. Those in the West who sought its roots looked to Bukharin and to NEP. But the slogans of perestroika do not come from NEP but from a later and less benign episode in Soviet history. As the Russian historian Kseniya Myalo observed, "...I cannot help but recall how often the word perestroika occurred in newspapers in the late 1920s."[3] It is an ordinary Russian word, but as a common political slogan it was born of Stalin's Second Revolution; the very concept of re-structuring belongs with the communist desire to transform and reorder society. The term perestroika is a particular marker of the rhetoric of A.A. Zhdanov, the standard-bearer of ideologically rigorous, mobilizational, "left" Stalinism. At the February-March meeting of the Central Committee in 1937, which laid down the ideological justification for the Great Terror, Zhdanov's report is on the subject "Perestroika of Party-Political Work."[4] Zhdanov also constantly used other key words that reappeared under Gorbachev: glasnost, democratization, and *samodeyatel'nost'* or "spontaneity."

I now wish to raise the possibility that there may indeed be a link between Zhdanov and the perestroika period, in the shape of three men: Otto Kuusinen, Yuri Andropov, Aleksei Rumyantsev.[5] To begin with the most important of these figures, Andropov owed his career to the extremism of the Great Terror, which had heaved him up, in 1938, to the position of First Secretary of the Yaroslavl Komsomol, at the ripe age of twenty-four. He and Kuusinen clearly belonged to the group around Zhdanov, and advocated Zhdanovite or left-Stalinist positions.

In 1949-50 the followers of Zhdanov were purged, often killed, in the "Leningrad Case." It may not be accidental, as the old Soviet phrase has it, that one of the provincial Komsomol leaders dismissed in the Leningrad case because of their Zhdanovite patrons was Yegor Ligachev, later to become best known in the West as Gorbachev's rival and opponent, though in the early stage he was, with Gorbachev and Ryzhkov, one of the three principal creators of perestroika.[6] Some of Zhdanov's supporters, including

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[3]"Peasant Culture in the 1920s and 1930s," *Social Sciences*, no. 1 (1990), p. 140. Walter Laqueur was the first person in the West to notice this. Research at the Library of Congress indicates that from 1929, the beginning of Stalin's "Second Revolution," to 1938 fourteen books used the word in their titles, but only two between 1939 and 1956. From 1957 through 1964, nineteen such titles appeared, during the period of Khrushchev's radicalism and populism.

[4]The original is in the former Central Party Archive: TsPA, fond 17, opis 2, delo 612.

[5]The roots of perestroika, although not the link with Zhdanov, have been probed by Frederick Kagan, "The Secret History of Perestroika,"originally published in *The National Interest* (Spring 1991), in Cohen and Vanden Heuval's *Voices of Glasnost*, and in the memoirs of Fyodor Burlatsky and Georgi Arbatov.

[6]Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva* (Novosibirsk, 1992), pp. 141-142.

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Kuusinen and Andropov, were saved by Nikita Khrushchev, and in 1951-53, just before Stalin's death, they came back to favor as the old dictator prepared for another campaign of terror marked politically by a new turn to the left. Stalin made Kuusinen a full member of the Presidium (formerly and subsequently the Politburo), and brought Andropov into the Central Committee staff as head of a sub-department. At the same time, a young economist, Aleksei Rumyantsev, was made head of the Science and Culture department of the Central Committee.[7] Appointed as Rumyantsev's deputy was none other than Aleksandr Yakovlev, later to be the intellectual architect of perestroika. Working together in the modest pale-green building on Moscow's Old Square, Kuusinen, Andropov, Rumyantsev and Yakovlev may have already been influencing each other and incubating a shared agenda for the future.

Under Khrushchev during the fifties and sixties, Kuusinen organized first a "collective" for writing a textbook, then, with Andropov, an editorial staff for the international communist journal *Problems of Peace and Socialism* in Prague, with Rumyantsev as the editor, and finally a Group of Consultants in the Central Committee staff. These groups were organized from intellectuals who turned out to be very influential in the course of perestroika: Burlatsky, Arbatov, Shakhnazarov, Chernyayev, Gerasimov, Brutents, Bovin, Bogomolov, and others. Georgi Arbatov has spoken of the way in which his friends were "indebted to these people [Kuusinen and Andropov] as *teachers*" [emphasis added].[8] As the legitimacy of the Soviet system sagged, these intellectuals began to mix the Zhdanovite or left-communist ideas imbibed from Andropov and Kuusinen with other ideas which were fundamentally Western. The staff of *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, under the aegis of Rumyantsev, was an important crucible for this potentially explosive mixture, because these intellectuals were living in Prague and talking to Czech intellectuals during the gestation of the Prague Spring. As time went on, the intellectuals, who continued to be linked with Andropov (Kuusinen having died in 1964), became far more radical than he was. At the end of Brezhnev's life, Andropov challenged him and followed him as general secretary. Andropov, himself dying, possessed police power and a group of intellectual reformers of ideology. He needed a political leader of stature to head the reformist group after him; he chose Gorbachev.

When Andropov died in 1984, this entire heritage came into the hands of Gorbachev and those who influenced him as he rapidly changed his views: Yakovlev and the intellectuals who had been affected by the Prague Spring. Many of these intellectuals now became key advisers and speechwriters to Gorbachev, and propagandists of perestroika after 1985. Thus there may have been a historical link between radical Stalinism and perestroika. This kind of tortuous evolution, like that of some Western intellectuals who moved from the left to conservatism without pausing in the center, is curious but understandable: people are sometimes compelled by reality to change the definition of the political structures they seek, but they will seek those goals with the same traits of character and in the same familiar ways as they pursued earlier goals.

The outcome of this long, complex evolution was, in the eighties, a dwindling group of reformers led by Gorbachev who were pursuing more and more extreme changes as time went on. Or, to put it in a way that brings out the paradox, they were pursuing a less and less communist agenda in a more and more communist way. This evolution is well illustrated by Gorbachev's change of view about the market. During the summer

[7]Werner G. Hahn, *Postwar Soviet Politics: The Fall of Zhdanov and the Defeat of Moderation, 1946-53* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 221-225.

[8]Arbatov interview, *Nedelya*, March 23, 1988.

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of 1990 Gorbachev apparently began to see in the market not the loathsome face of alienation, as Marx did, but a magic that could transfigure life, creating a new man. In a press conference with Margaret Thatcher, Gorbachev said the following:

> ...I will tell you about an interesting conversation which I had at Stanford when I met a group of professors...Professor Friedman, the economist...had a very interesting observation to make. He recalled that, after World War II, when the U.S. set out to help the Japanese...to master the forms of a market economy, a group of them, specialists, arrived in Japan. His first impression...was that the people were wholly unprepared for working in the conditions which they wanted to propose. They were all very unhurried people. They lacked energy and initiative. They were absolutely not the right kind of human material.... Subsequently he quickly changed his mind. You know how the Japanese work now, he said.
>
> I met leaseholders in the Kremlin recently, and they are the very people who are working under conditions which are necessary for a market economy. I was struck by their openness, judgment, experience, and initiative. They had so many proposals. That discussion ended with them sitting around preparing a proposal for the president....These are already different people.[9]

We had thought that the path to reform in the Soviet system lay in the leaders' abandonment of the Utopian hope for a New Man. We believed they had abandoned it. But here we see a Gorbachev who, after all the disappointments since 1985, still believed in the imminent arrival of the New Man. The differences between him and Soviet leaders of the movement's earlier and most Utopian phase are these: not communism, but the market, will create the New Man. And the prophet of the new man is not Marx, but Milton Friedman.

It is impossible to understand the collapse of Soviet communism without appreciating the role of ideas and convictions in history. One of the mistakes we made about the Soviet Union was our facile confidence that the more and more far-reaching compromise of its most public claims by the communist regime would never have any practical consequences, either in loss of popular support or in any communist attempt to reclaim their principles. In fact, it was the contradiction between the regime's ostensible principles and the sordid reality of its performance that eroded most of its popular support. Late in the day, a small but powerful part of the communist elite embarked upon a desperate attempt to reverse things by making the system live up to what they understood to be its ideals. But this attempt only had the effect of making the contradiction between ideals and reality more apparent, particularly after glasnost began revealing the atrocious crimes of the communist past. Before long, the communist system was irretrievably shattered. It had been destroyed, in large part because of the contradiction between ideals and reality, and almost without a shot being fired, in about the same time that fascism had earlier been destroyed by around-the-clock shooting and bombing. The immense power of ideas and convictions is a clear, indisputable lesson of the collapse of communism. One might think that this lesson would be noticed in the United States, a country that was founded on a declaration that "We hold these truths to be self-evident," and whose myriad races, religions and ethnic groups are united by almost nothing except universalistic principles. But no one, it seems, has drawn this conclusion from the collapse of communism.

Martin Malia has rightly said that "it is impossible to understand anything about

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[9]Joint Press Conference, Gorbachev and Thatcher, June 8, 1990, Moscow Television, June 8, in FBIS-SOV, 11 June 1990, 26, italics mine. Compare Gorbachev's remarks on returning from Moscow after the coup, when he gave the popular reaction to the coup as a sign that perestroika had changed people.

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Gorbachev and perestroika without taking seriously the origins of the Soviet system in a Utopia."[10] It was obviously the utopian origin of the regime that led to its extraordinary pretensions, its pageantry and bombast—from the red velvet banners embroidered with heroic slogans, now for sale cheap on Moscow's Arbat Street, to the fervid press rhetoric which contrasted so starkly with the sullen dullness of Soviet daily life. It was the origin of the system in a utopia that led to its practical failure, above all in the economic area. But at the same time it was also the utopian roots of the system that kept its appeal to the imagination alive, bringing about Gorbachev's extreme overreaction to its practical failure.

But after the totalitarian model was discredited in the 1960s, our mainstream Sovietology entirely missed the importance of utopianism to the Soviet system. Although the totalitarian model had many inadequacies, it had the strong merit of recognizing the absolutely central importance of the utopian drive, and of the way in which it conditioned so many other features of the system. After the sixties this was forgotten. In 1980 one of the most serious observers of Soviet politics was able to write:

> Most significant is the radical decline of the elite impulse to reshape society. In the mind of the ruling elite, the Soviet social structure has found its permanent shape—at least for the foreseeable future....The innovative impulse of the political elite is focused entirely on functioning innovation and not on restructuring innovations.[11]

Is this not precisely the opposite of what began to unfold with the arrival of Andropov in the Secretariat in May 1982, even to the unlucky word "restructuring"?

Bialer's view belonged within the broader intellectual movement to "de-exceptionalize" the Soviet Union, to show that it had become essentially a normal state. But the collapse of the Soviet experiment after seventy years shows that the Soviet state was exceptional. The attempted restoration of communist principles in the Soviet Union ended in the final overthrow of those principles. Such is the irony of history. Communism's death can be understood, in large part, as an accidental overdose of its own medicine.

The Patrician Revolution

ONE OF THE effects of our scholarship's depreciation of ideas and convictions was the expectation that, if there was to be reform in the Soviet Union, it would be made by "technocrats" or "pragmatists" such as industrial managers, not by people who were most closely identified with the alien or communist side of the regime, such as the ideological specialists within the Party apparatus, the closely related leadership of the international communist movement, and the political police. Most of us saw these groups as conservative. It was thus a surprise to find the "secret police" intimately involved in the origins of perestroika. The campaign against the "era of stagnation" was opened by Yuri Andropov, chairman of the KGB, who used the organization to blackmail and weaken the Brezhnevite faction in the leadership, and to secure the most powerful position in the country first for himself and then (after the brief Chernenko period) for his chosen heir, Mikhail Gorbachev.[12] As Raisa Gorbacheva told Jeane Kirkpatrick, "We owe everything to Yuri Vladimirovich." The subsequent chiefs of the KGB, Chebrikov and Kriuchkov (who had served with

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[10]"To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedelus*, Winter 1990.

[11]Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 55.

[12]See the important essay by Jeremy Azrael, *The KGB in Kremlin Politics* (Santa Monica: RAND/UCLA Center, 1989), pp. 24-32, and Myron Rush's writings.

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Andropov in Hungary), were important allies of Gorbachev during key periods in the radicalization of perestroika[13], although both broke with him subsequently. Gorbachev's last chairman of the KGB, Vadim Bakatin, has testified that "Gorbachev...saw in the KGB not so much a danger to his transformations, as a support for them."[14] Many other supporters of reformism had served in the KGB/MVD (Shevardnadze as Minister in Georgia) or had close KGB/MVD connections (e.g. Vlasov, Pugo, Bakatin, Primakov).

It was also a surprise to find militant reformers within the ideological specialization of the Party apparatus and the closely connected part of the central apparat that dealt with the international communist movement. Andropov, of course, had served as the head of the Central Committee (CC) department supervising the Warsaw Pact countries before becoming KGB chairman. He inherited the subsequently influential intellectuals (Burlatsky, Arbatov, Shakhnazarov, *et al.*), who themselves worked in the propaganda apparatus and its affiliates, from his close ally, the Finnish Old Bolshevik Kuusinen, who had served as Executive Secretary of the Comintern through the bulk of the interwar period. Gorbachev's closest ally in the Party apparatus was his advisor and speechwriter Aleksandr Yakovlev, who had made his career in ideology, first in the provinces, then in the central CC apparatus. But Gorbachev's most important ally during his initial, less radical phase—1985-88—was Yegor Ligachev, who had served as Secretary for Ideology of Novosibirsk Obkom[15] and then as Deputy Chief of the CC Agitprop Department for the Russian republic when it was split in 1961-65.

It is also interesting to take a brief, impressionistic glance at the social origins of the people who made perestroika. In any informal survey of this group's biographies, one is struck by the extent of their connections with the regime's aristocracy. The economists Shmelyov (who married Khrushchev's daughter) and Shatalin (son of a Central Committee inspector and nephew of a Central Committee Secretary, who sat in Malenkov's ample lap as a child), are only extreme cases. There are many children of Old Bolsheviks—Burlatsky, Yegor Yakovlev, Len Karpinsky are examples. There are a number of children of high officials in the security police: Yegor Yakovlev, the son of an NKVD general, Deputy Chairman of the Ukrainian Cheka; Yavlinsky, son of the head of the Moscow KGB; Arbatov, son of a high NKVD operative in Germany and Japan.[16]

In this company, Boris Yeltsin seems unusual in being the child of peasants. In fact, even the supporters of radical reformism who do come from relatively modest origins seem to come disproportionately from the Soviet system's equivalent of the rural gentry: from the families of the strong supporters of communism in the 1920s and 1930s countryside (a definite minority at the time), including collective farm chairmen, the officials of machine tractor stations, editors of rural newspapers, school teachers, etc. Aleksandr Yakovlev, for example, was the son of the chairman of one of the first collective farms in the province where Andropov headed the Komsomol; Gorbachev the son of a rural Machine Tractor Station functionary and the grandson of a collective farm chairman; Shevardnadze the son of a rural school official in the revolutionary Gurian area, who joined the Party in 1924, and cousin of an insurgent leader in 1905. About the family of Ligachev, an aeronautical engineer by training, we know only that he was born in a village but that his father, a Party member, was

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[13] Azrael, pp. 32-43.

[14] Vadim Bakatin, *Izbavleniye ot KGB* (Moscow: Novosti, 1992), p. 37.

[15] Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva*, p. 10.

[16] Reading between the lines of Arbatov's autobiography, *Zatyanuvsheesya vyzdorovleniye (1953-1985 gg.): Svidetel'stvo sovremennika* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodniye otnosheniya, 1991), p. 353.

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not a peasant. Ligachev began to move in elite circles at least from the end of the war, when he married the daughter of Lieutenant-General Ivan Zinoviev, the Chief of Staff of the Siberian Military District, shot in 1937.[17] Such rural "gentry" filled a distinctive place in Soviet society under Stalin. They were officials, privileged in a modest way. But, unlike urban communists, they had endured and fought a "second revolution," the brutal and chaotic collectivization. Until relatively late (perhaps down to 1944 in Gorbachev's home area) to represent the regime in a village meant to take a position and to take risks. Stalin's rural officials may have had a higher proportion of fanatic idealists, a lower proportion of careerists, than the regime as a whole.

Thus perestroika was in an important sense a movement of an elite, an aristocratic revolution. In this respect it contrasts with most revolutions, like the French, which tend to have been led by members of disadvantaged classes and groups that had been kept out of political power and often isolated from the national tradition, though given enough education and status to contend for power. The USSR after Stalin was full of people of this latter kind: the upwardly mobile sons of peasants or workers who had received educations in engineering, agronomy, or veterinary medicine before moving into full-time party work. It is reasonable to suspect that the majority of these people were technicians or careerists rather than idealist communists. By the reign of Brezhnev they were ruling the country, and Brezhnev himself is a perfect example of them. They provided the environment for the truly fantastic corruption that gripped the country in the 'seventies.

The key point is that, although by a strange paradox they ruled it, these people were rather isolated from the "high" tradition of their own regime, which was highly theoretical and very Westernizing. A wonderful vignette in Fedor Burlatsky's memoirs conveys the relationship of this social group to "high" Marxism-Leninism. Burlatsky was expounding to Brezhnev the theoretical flaws of a re-Stalinizing memorandum from Brezhnev's enemy Shelepin.

> I began to expound our position to Brezhnev point by point. The more I explained, the more his face changed. It began to look tense and drawn until we realized, to our horror, that Leonid Ilyich had hardly understood a word. I brought my fountain of eloquence to a halt and he said with winning sincerity, "It's hard for me to grasp all this. On the whole, to be honest, this isn't my area. My strong point is organization and psychology," and he made vague circular motions with his fingers spread wide open.[18]

We can now refine our thesis. The perestroika revolution was a revolution begun not by the deprived but by the owners and operators of the Soviet system and their children. It was also, on the whole, a revolution of those who in their youth still cherished the "high" Soviet tradition (Marxist-Leninist ideals) in some sense, against those who actually held political power during the 1970s but represented Marxist-Leninist principles only in a vastly simplified and debased way. In a certain sense, perestroika began as an attempt to take back the revolution from the bumpkins who had stolen it.

Democratic Centralism

THE NATURE OF Bolshevik political culture—in particular, the fact that the Soviet tradition was one of periodic revolution from above—goes a long way toward explaining why the Soviet elite was willing to gamble on perestroika. Soviet

[17] Ligachev, *Zagadka Gorbacheva*, 140; *Politbyuro, Orgbyuro, Sekretariat TsK RKP(B)-VKP(B)-KPSS* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), p. 156.

[18] Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring*, translated by Daphne Skillen (New York: Scribner's, 1988), pp. 213-214.

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"aristocrats" were particularly attracted, as we have seen, to a change that promised to somehow bring back their ideals and their power. But why did the Brezhnev-style careerists give up power? After all, the events of 1990-91, culminating in the abortive coup, showed that this category comprised the bulk of the ruling elite.

The ruling elite of the Soviet Union—widely thought before the event to be single-mindedly and ruthlessly power oriented—voted to give up its power. To begin with, the Politburo and Central Committee elected the reformers Andropov and Gorbachev as leaders. Then, at the Twenty-Seventh Congress in March 1986, the Party approved Gorbachev's program of moderate reforms. The following year, at its January 1987 meeting, the Central Committee voted unanimously for Gorbachev's startling turn to democratization. At the Nineteenth Conference in the summer of 1988 and following meetings, the Party voted to create an essentially new structure of elected assemblies that would take over much of the Party's governing responsibilities, and to elect those assemblies in multi-candidate elections, which when held in 1989 and 1990 fatally wounded the Party's legitimacy. The most decisive step of all was taken in February 1990, when the CC voted for Gorbachev's proposal to end its monopoly of power, agreeing in principle to a multi-party system, and to end its opposition to private property, thus abolishing the core of Leninism and the core of Marxism in one three-day meeting.[19] Having undermined its own legitimacy at the February Plenum, the Party voted at its Twenty-Eighth (and last) Congress in July 1990 to destroy itself organizationally by giving up the Party's supervision of the government, by removing all government officials (except Gorbachev) from the Politburo, and by filling that body with nonentities. Well before this, the glasnost' campaign had already substantially relinquished Party control over ideas, a crucial form of power in Bolshevik eyes.

The Bolshevik tradition of democratic centralism explains the suicide of the quintessential Bolshevik institution, the Party. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was an organization that attained and maintained its power through the doctrine of democratic centralism, that is, by lower organizations' disciplined execution of decisions from real decision-making bodies at the top, the CC Secretariat, CC departments, and the Politburo. Democratic centralism still operated, at the crucial February 1990 meeting, to make the CC accept the Politburo's policy handed down from above. As one CC member, Boris Yeltsin, reported:

> ...there is still some kind of fear, which does not permit them to raise their hands when the members of the Politburo are sitting there on stage.[20]

As well as insisting on unquestioning obedience from below, the doctrine of democratic centralism also required unanimity at the top. From the time of Lenin, the losing side in a Party debate had been required to submit to the winning side, so as to preserve the Party's unity in the face of outside threats. Thus did the Party's thick armor against external threats become a vulnerability in protecting against internal threats.

But why was it Gorbachev's position that won within the Politburo, given that the Politburo majority was, throughout the years of perestroika, rarely in agreement with Gorbachev's radical point of view? Because the Politburo did not vote in the normal Western way, with votes "for" and "against." Yegor Ligachev, Gorbachev's ultimate rival as Second Secretary of the party, has revealed that as long as he attended its meetings the

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[19]For greater detail see "The Suicide of Soviet Communism," *The Journal of Democracy*, Spring 1990.

[20]News conference, Feb. 7, 1990, Moscow Domestic Service in Russian, in FBIS-SOV, 8 Feb. 1990, 50.

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Politburo never had a split vote. Ivan Antonovich, a member of the Politburo of the former Russian Communist Party, agrees: "It is absolutely excluded....Anyone against the consensus will be kicked out of the Politburo."[21] So disagreements almost always were settled before the meeting, by informal means. In fact, many nominal "Politburo" decisions seem to have been made by two or three people who kept the others in the dark. One comic example of this is that Politburo members never seem to have been consulted about decisions on their own dismissal; they would find out by a good-bye call on the car phone, from the newspaper or, in Beria's case, when armed men entered the Politburo meeting to arrest him.

In a sense, the Politburo was less an institution that conferred on its officeholders certain specified powers than a name, like that of the Japanese emperor, that was used to legitimize the exercise of power on different issues by different very small groups within the Politburo. This arrangement was ideally suited to facilitate the application of controlled pressures from outside the "legitimate" authority, such as the pressures from certain provincial party secretaries and from the KGB that seemed to have played a role in Gorbachev's election, pressures from holders of *power*, legitimate or illegitimate. The most powerful had ready-made an institution that was used every week to give "constitutional" sanction to decisions made elsewhere, and this was more important than a majority within the Politburo. (In 1957 the "anti-Party Group" had an "arithmetical majority" against Khrushchev in the Politburo; but, it was Khrushchev who remained, and they who were dismissed).

The most powerful person was normally the General Secretary. He, both as General Secretary and as the chairman of the Politburo's meetings, had enormous resources that he could use to manipulate the Politburo and gradually bend it to his will. Using the resulting Politburo decision, he could then enlist the Central Committee, whose decrees were authoritative for the entire country, behind his personal decisions. Gorbachev (and other knowledgeable insiders) on several occasions summed up his power over the Politburo, the Party, and the country with the awkward and rusty word "dictator," a word our political scientists had shunned since the totalitarian model fell into disrepute:

> There was not, nor will there be, more power, or more dictatorship, or bigger resources than the general secretary of the CPSU's Central Committee had at his disposal in any single state. If the point revolves around power, there was no need to change anything. The laws had no restraining effect at all: Just go ahead and do everything you decided.[22]

The enormous power of Gorbachev goes far to explain why the elite gave up power, contrary to our expectations. They gave up power because of their own reformism and because of fear of the public, but most of all because Gorbachev forced them to, by applying and appealing to the doctrine and practice of democratic centralism.

The dramatic changes in the Soviet Union were not only or mainly the result of Westernization or modernization. They were even more the product of communism's own traditions and habits. It was democratic centralism that ultimately enabled Gorbachev to sway the Politburo, enabled the Politburo to control the Central Committee, finally enabled the Central Committee to control the vote of the Twenty-Eighth Congress of the Party. Democratic centralism was the lever by which one man toppled the towering edifice

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[21] Ligachev luncheon, November 14, 1991. Antonovich interview, March 6, 1992. This material is drawn from a study of Politburo decisionmaking now in progress for my book on Soviet bureaucratic politics.

[22] Gorbachev speech in Minsk, Moscow Domestic Service, in FBIS-SOV, 27 Feb. 1991, p. 78.

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of Soviet power. Gorbachev, the leader of the country's communists, forced his own movement to commit suicide, as Jim Jones forced the other members of the People's Temple to drink poisoned Kool-Aid. The Communist Party lost its power in a Soviet Jonestown.

The Bolshevik tradition inspired Gorbachev. The institutions and customs of democratic centralism empowered him. With that inspiration, and that power, he destroyed the state that he commanded.

Conclusion

ABOUT SUCH STRANGE things—suicidal impulses, democratic centralism and the rest of the alien subculture of Bolshevism, ideals and convictions, Utopianism, the revolutionary spirit—the public did not hear much from us, the experts, in recent decades. Our intellectual disciplines encouraged the opinions that Gorbachev was a moderate reformer not unlike our own Bill Clinton, that revolutionary Bolshevism was as irrelevant today as American Masonry, and that the great slave empire in the East was, at the deepest level, not dissimilar from America. These sciences of man minimized ambition, palliated oppression, buried revolution, anesthetized our imagination.

More than 2,000 years after Croesus' defeat on the river Halys, the bejewelled kings of antiquity, with their chariots and plaited beards, are dust. Japanese tourists, wan and serious, industriously photograph the shapeless ruins of Sardis, Croesus' capital. This transition is the result of surprise after surprise through history. Even the foolish King Croesus had some openness to surprises, believing, as mankind once did, in fate, in fortune, and in the malice of mysterious gods. These beliefs, however groundless, gave people some distance from the here and now in which we are always sunken. But throughout the career of perestroika, first astonishing, then exhilarating, finally catastrophic, most of the specific assessments of our Sovietology worked to reinforce the deep, instinctive conviction that the world will always be as it is right now—except that it will become, gradually and harmoniously, even more as it is now. But history continued to be unsatisfied, restless, violent, full of surprises. History has mocked our wisdom. □

We invite readers to respond to the essays in this special issue of The National Interest. *Letters of 800 words or less will have the best chance of being accepted for publication in the Summer issue.*

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The Role of Popular Discontent

Peter Reddaway

HOW MUCH DID popular disaffection with communism and Soviet imperialism contribute to the collapse of the USSR? This complex question has in general been little researched or understood by Sovietologists. First, most of them have not studied the at least partially visible roots of the disaffection in the period from 1956 to 1986. Second, when the disaffection came increasingly into public view in 1988-89, observers like Stephen Cohen tended to misperceive it as being mostly reformist and pro-Gorbachev in nature, rather than, in large measure, anti-Establishment, anti-imperial, or anticommunist. And third, when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, some scholars like Martin Malia misinterpreted events in an opposite way, seeing the disaffection as constituting a popular revolution, rather than a series of popular revolts. These revolts made an important contribution to the collapse of an empire. But they did not, in my opinion, represent an authentic revolution.

Even now, in early 1993, no such revolution has yet taken place in the USSR's successor states, except perhaps in the Baltic countries. Most of the successor states, including Russia and Ukraine, find their economies in an alarming no man's land between the old command system and the market, and have political institutions that are extremely unstable and only superficially democratic. Also, their public life features minimally disguised and only slightly reconstructed communists playing—with sundry potentially powerful allies—a large role in politics and economics, and certainly not fading away. Among the states that have so far seen little change is Uzbekistan. Here, under a new name, the Communist Party is still firmly in power, and its leader openly proclaims communist China as his model.

Why, then, did most Sovietologists not perceive the nature and significance of popular disaffection in the Soviet Union? In search of some clues, let us look at a characteristic episode. In America in 1983 a major, eighteen-month effort of cooperative research and discussion culminated in the publication of the volume *After Brezhnev*, edited by Robert Byrnes. It charted current trends in the USSR, and considered how they were likely to play out over the subsequent ten years. Thirty-five scholars took part, many of them widely respected in academic and public circles. Eight of them wrote the extended essays that made up the book.[1]

In the preface, Byrnes wrote that "the volume as a whole reflects to a large degree the views of all participants." Further, "all of

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[1] *After Brezhnev* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,1983). The authors were Robert Byrnes, Seweryn Bialer, Robert Campbell, Coit Blacker, Gail Lapidus, Maurice Friedberg, Andrzej Korbonski, and Adam Ulam.

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us agree that there is no likelihood whatsoever that the Soviet Union will become a political democracy or that it will collapse in the foreseeable future." Seweryn Bialer, in a contribution containing many perceptive points, nonetheless dismissed such notions as "the coming revolution in Russia" and the imminent "revolt of the nationalities," concluding that the Soviet Union did not then and in all probability would not in the next decade face a systemic, life-endangering crisis. It had enormous unused reserves of political and social stability. Gigantic economies such as the Soviet Union's, presided over by intelligent and educated professionals, did not go bankrupt or disintegrate.

All in all, Bialer wrote, "I am drawn inescapably to the conclusion that we will witness the external expansion of an internally declining power."

In coming years there will be much debate about why most observers were slow or unable, especially in the period 1989-91, to perceive that the USSR and its communist system were disintegrating. But surely one broad reason for this failure is that many of them held views not very different from those expounded in *After Brezhnev*. To put it simply, the book's authors maintained that while the Soviet regime faced numerous problems, its leaders were determined and experienced men who had, using the Party and police apparatuses, skillfully divided, cowed, or bought off all sections of the population, and would anyway act firmly to suppress any dissenting political or ethnic group that might emerge.

WHY THEN *did* the USSR break up? Leaving aside discussion of very important "external" factors like the growing gap between Soviet and Western advances in science, technology, and weaponry, Soviet overextension abroad, and the USSR's diplomatic isolation, I believe that the first initiative inside the USSR that set the ball rolling toward the system's collapse was a strategic decision made by Gorbachev's group within the Party leadership. It derived partly from these external factors, and partly from concern over their primary causes, the deepening economic and political stagnation at home. The decision was to try to make communist rule secure in the USSR for the indefinite future by launching, from above, a series of economic and political reforms.

However, the group did not get enough support for these reforms from either the *nomenklatura* or "the people," and although it was remarkably skillful at neutralizing *nomenklatura* opposition, it soon proved unable to keep control of the popular opposition. Once glasnost, democratization, and perestroika had gained a certain momentum, the second key development was this loss of control, which was partially due to the emergence, from below, of numerous independent groups espousing nationalist, anticommunist, and anti-Establishment programs.

The third key was the fact that in the face of this mounting challenge, important parts of the *nomenklatura* in most of the republics, including Russia, abandoned the supposedly strict communist principles of "democratic centralism," i.e., absolute obedience to central commands, and paid little attention to the increasingly frantic appeals of Gorbachev and the federal government to hold the country together. Instead, disloyally flouting Party discipline, each such leader sought to preserve his own power by suddenly embracing the centrifugal nationalism of his own republic, thus greatly accelerating the union's disintegration.

The force and significance of all three of these key developments were not well understood by many Sovietologists. Perhaps the most basic cause of inadequate understanding of the second and third factors was the pervasive neglect or distrust by many scholars and analysts of non-official Soviet sources of information. Much of this neglect and distrust probably stemmed from an inappropriate application to the USSR of social science methods devised for non-communist systems, or from a fear that the use of such

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sources might jeopardize receipt of visas needed to visit the Soviet Union, or from anti-Western or pro-Soviet biases, or from some combination of these factors. But whatever the explanations in any individual case, the neglect was not justified by normal criteria for objective research.

To study a semi-closed society like Soviet society, it was clearly important to spend a significant amount of time in the USSR, in order to get to know its people and institutions at first hand. If one did this, it soon became apparent that many Soviet citizens lived double lives in which they said orthodox things in public, but were much more critical of the existing order in private. It also became clear that when the press admitted that "in individual places" (*v otdel'nykh mestakh*) matters were not as they should be, in reality these "shortcomings" (*nedostatki*) were widespread.

If one understood these fundamentals, it was not difficult to understand the importance of non-official Soviet sources. Most of the interviews, articles, and books by new émigrés and defectors, for example, though their contents diverged sharply from the official accounts, rang true. While such sources, like any other source, had to be scrutinized for bias and exaggeration, the widespread corruption, the pervasive hypocrisy in public, and the private cynicism of officials about ideology that they described were all things that direct experience of Soviet life should have already at least partially revealed to foreigners who possessed the necessary linguistic skills and normal powers of observation. Likewise, when *samizdat* materials began to proliferate in the mid-1960s, it was easy to see that their authors—soon to be known as dissenters or dissidents—had simply decided to write and circulate more or less what they really thought, and not just to say it to trusted friends in private.

The seemingly small number of scholars who read non-official sources carefully were still faced with the difficult task of assessing the collective weight and significance of these materials. Did the dissident group have a stronger social base than the often small number of signatures on their documents might suggest? Were some of the groups seedbeds of future political opposition? Or were they too marginal or eccentric to be seen in this light? The history of the last few years suggests strongly that the answers to the first two questions are "Yes," and to the third, "No." Further support for this view, partly statistical in nature, comes from official documents which have recently been extracted from Soviet archives.[2]

These documents show beyond question that the Soviet leaders took popular and intellectual disaffection extremely seriously. From their point of view—which gave absolute priority to maintaining the Party's power—they were right to do so. As I have held since the late 1960s, anti-imperial and anticommunist views and emotions did indeed pose a real potential threat to party rule. That these views and emotions were less developed and prevalent in the USSR than in Eastern Europe, does not affect this judgment. "Compensation" for that fact is that, unlike Eastern Europe, the USSR had no outside power that would come to the rescue of its Communist Party, if the latter's rule were to be threatened. Thus, from their viewpoint, the Soviet leaders had good reason to nip all forms of disaffection in the bud. And not surprisingly, the Kremlin did this with extra zeal in the wake of each eruption in Eastern Europe—in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in Poland in 1980-81.

At first, though, we should note, Gorbachev did not diverge from this policy. Whipping up a considerably exaggerated sense of economic crisis, he prescribed as the main cures for the crisis the streamlining of economic management and the imposition of tougher all-round discipline on the whole population. This helped him to make his personal power more secure, but did not produce impressive economic results. So he decided, after a year and a half in office, to change his strategy. Now the main goals

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became market socialism and—to overcome the inevitably fierce resistance to such radicalism by the Party and ministerial hierarchies which employed almost twenty million officials—a partial democratization of the political system. This democratization would also serve two further purposes. It would release a lot of pent-up tensions in society, caused by the crackdown of 1979-85 on all forms of dissent and deviance. This, Gorbachev hoped, would gain him popular support. And it would also impress the West, making it more inclined to cooperate with him on economic matters and on the radical arms control measures, which were essential if he were to reduce his military budget and free up resources for consumer industries.

But why did Gorbachev not think that democratization would be dangerous for the Party's monopoly on political power, to which he was certainly devoted? The answer can probably be summed up like this: he apparently believed that popular gratitude for his democratization and the dramatic economic advances that he hoped it would facilitate, would easily neutralize any ungrateful anti-imperial or anticommunist agitators. In a 1987 speech that was an eloquent paean to democracy, he repeatedly rejected the view that democracy might subvert socialism or public order. "Democracy," he said, "is order of a higher degree, based not on...the mindless carrying out of instructions, but on wholehearted, active participation by the whole community in all of society's affairs" (*Pravda*, February 26, 1987). In another speech he expressed the Slavophile view that any community can reach agreement, even on contentious issues, through honest discussion by all its members. If there should be one malicious holdout, he would be so isolated after the discussion that he could safely be ignored. For Gorbachev this also meant that there was no need for any opposition parties, for they would only foment artificial divisions in society.

There were, it seems, several sources for the naivete of these views. First, in provincial Stavropol, where Gorbachev was a Communist official for a quarter of a century (1953-78), there was too little in the way of openly expressed nationalist or anticommunist dissent for him to get a feel for it at first hand. Second, his Politburo colleague Alexander Yakovlev, a Party intellectual, fed him roughly the views sketched above, which were also supported by another Politburo member, his friend Eduard Shevardnadze, and by liberal party intellectuals whom he consulted on economic and social problems from about 1983. He also heard pro-democracy views from the foreign leaders he began to meet for serious discussions at around the same time, and he presumably read some more when he reviewed the file of the exiled Andrei Sakharov, prior to releasing him and calling him back to Moscow in December 1986 to resume his "patriotic work."

Beyond these factors—which highlight Gorbachev's high regard for the West and his almost exaggerated respect for certain sorts of intellectuals—he had in his personality a certain overconfidence about his admittedly formidable powers of manipulation, an overconfidence that occasionally amounted to recklessness. This made him believe that he would always be able to change course, as in the past, if things were to go wrong. Later he admitted there was one key factor that he had not foreseen—the rise and the power of ethnic nationalism.

The sensational release of Sakharov was the prelude to the release in 1987-88 of most of the country's political prisoners. Gorbachev addressed another major source of popular disaffection when he got the Politburo to agree to remove all Soviet troops from Afghanistan by early 1989. And the evidence suggests that by this time it was understood in the Politburo that military intervention in Eastern Europe was now unthinkable, since it would only recreate the sort of popular alienation caused by nine years of struggle and death in the Afghan quagmire. All these developments were intended to facilitate, in Gorbachev's above

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quoted words, the "wholehearted, active participation by the whole community" in the patriotic program of perestroika.

Prior to 1989, Gorbachev apparently hoped that although hardliners hated most of these policies and were therefore trying to organize against him, the policies were building for him a much bigger constituency of supporters which would swamp and neutralize the hardliners. Now, however, the unforeseen consequences of his liberalism began to weaken his control over events. To see how, and to try to weigh the contribution of popular disaffection to the process, we shall separate out the most significant episodes in chronological sequence.

By 1989, some of the "popular fronts" that had been created with official encouragement to mobilize both Communists and non-Communists in support of perestroika, had become, above all in the Baltic republics, vehicles for nationalism. Nationalist dissidents who had recently been released from jail assumed prominent positions in them. In the partially free elections of early 1989 for the revamped, quasi-democratic Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Baltic popular fronts caused a sensation by trouncing the Communists and winning three quarters of the Baltic seats. Meanwhile, in certain larger cities of Russia and Ukraine some of the official Communist candidates, including a few big names, lost to former dissidents and other liberals, and—in one specially important case—to a disgraced former Politburo member, Boris Yeltsin.

What the victors' campaign workers had discovered in all these cases was that it was quite possible, with good organization, strong leadership, and hard work, to mobilize on behalf of certain candidates popular disaffection with communism, with Soviet imperialism, or just with the undefined Establishment—"Them." If the candidates had previously been imprisoned or disgraced for their beliefs, and if in their campaigns they attacked the above mentioned objects of popular hatred with sufficient boldness, they had, in the more politicized cities and throughout the Baltic, a good chance of being elected. Most of them, of course, spoke strongly in support of democracy or nationalism, or both. But evidently this moved the voters less than "negative" attacks on the institutions, symbols, and ideology of a regime that had oppressed them with little respite for decades.

IN THE WAKE of this profound shock for the Establishment came another event of great significance for understanding the role of popular disaffection in the USSR's collapse. In April 1989 troops killed nineteen Georgians, many of them women, when dispersing a long-running demonstration by non-violent nationalists in Tbilisi. In the post-election atmosphere of anti-Establishment euphoria this action caused a major uproar. Several commissions were set up to investigate it, the top politicians, including Gorbachev, tried to disclaim responsibility, and numerous military commanders and officials around the country declared that the army must never again be used for internal police work. As a result, the resolve of Party officials and commanders of MVD and KGB troops, as well as army troops, concerning the prospect of killing people in future policing actions of this sort was severely weakened. It was further weakened in January 1990, when a somewhat similar action in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, killed at least 130 people and ignited still more outrage. And it was constantly sapped as month after month the media carried detailed attacks on a wide variety of officials and institutions. Among these were many made in parliamentary forums like the first Congress of People's Deputies, the whole proceedings of which were shown live on television.

One outcome of all this was that in an increasing number of the non-Russian republics nationalism made rapid strides and became more and more separatist. Key factors were the union-wide revulsion at the killings in Tbilisi and Baku, the resulting

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statements by troop commanders about future restraint or non-participation in such situations, the Kremlin's minimal punishment of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia for moving steadily toward independence in the face of all Gorbachev's persuasion and bullying to the contrary, the Kremlin's complete inaction at the fall of communism throughout most of Eastern Europe in late 1989, and the decision by many leading communists in the republics to defy Moscow and, in an opportunistic bid to retain their power, engage the local nationalists in political combat by suddenly claiming to be as nationalist as they were.

The year 1990 saw the development of the opposition's use of popular disaffection to press its cause. First, in January, it organized demonstrations of several hundred thousand people in Moscow to force Gorbachev and the Congress of People's Deputies, much against their will, to amend the sixth article of the constitution, thus ending the Communists' political monopoly and permitting the formation of other parties. This was using "the street" against the elected legislature. The latter could be successfully intimidated because elections to the legislatures of the fifteen republics were imminent. Both the Communist Party and individual deputies feared that they would suffer in those elections if they did not accede to the demands of the huge demonstrations. This could also have led to serious violence, had the crowds not been appeased.

As a result, the republican elections of February-March 1990 took place in freer conditions than the union elections of a year earlier, and the opposition scored further gains. In addition, Yeltsin was elected to the Russian Parliament, soon became its speaker, and then, in June 1991, won popular election to Russia's newly created executive presidency with 57 percent of the vote. These developments, which simply would not have happened without the mobilization of popular disaffection behind them, created almost overnight a politicized Russian nationalism comparable to the nationalism of several other republics. This was not a separatist nationalism of the Baltic type, but—partly to have some defenses against the Kremlin's economic incompetence—it insisted on republican "sovereignty" and a new union treaty far looser than what Gorbachev wanted, one which would in reality be no more than confederal in nature.

Thus 1990 saw the steady loss by Gorbachev and the federal government of popular support and legitimacy, as people's disaffection was channeled into the powerful movements for republican sovereignty or even separatism. In the fall, this deep threat to the millions of officials who worked for the federal government at last provoked serious action from the hardliners whom Gorbachev had so brilliantly thwarted for three and a half years. They accused him publicly of having unleashed revolutionary anti-union and anticommunist forces which were now making an alliance to overthrow communism and dismember the country. In October they forced him to drop his support for academician Shatalin's radical economic reform plans. In November-December they compelled him to start replacing the more liberal members of his government with hardliners, and to take a more authoritarian line on freedom of expression. And in January 1991 they got him to sanction a military action to suppress the secessionist Baltic governments by force.

At this point a crucial test of both the hardliners' resolve and the strength of popular opposition took place. When the first military actions caused eighteen deaths in Vilnius and Riga, Gorbachev called a halt to appraise the situation. He found that there were heavy costs, no benefits, and no prospects of any benefits, unless he was prepared to kill thousands of people. The eighteen deaths had not caused the defenders of the Baltic parliaments to run away: many of them, it turned out, were ready to die. The deaths had provoked large-scale demonstra-

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tions against the regime in many Soviet cities. Yeltsin had denounced the killings and called on Russian troops not to shoot. Several military commanders in the Baltic said or indicated publicly that they would not give orders to shoot. Foreign leaders and international organizations were threatening and even adopting economic and other sanctions against the Soviet Union.

If, then, Gorbachev were to have carried through the military plan, these very serious consequences of the first action would have become a hundred times more serious. His own deeply cherished international reputation as a humane man of peace would have been destroyed, non-Baltic republics like Georgia would have seceded in protest, there would not have been enough mobilizable troops to prevent them from seceding, and even holding down a seething Baltic for the indefinite future would have been problematic. In short, it was easy for Gorbachev to show the hardliners that their policy of suppression could not work. Even if they were to oust him in a coup, the instruments at their disposal were much too unreliable for them to hold the union together by force. Officers and men would have mutinied in large numbers—and probably in the MVD and KGB, as well as in the military.

January 1991 was thus the decisive moment, one which showed that the USSR could no longer be held together, except perhaps for a short time as a loose confederation of nine or ten of the fifteen republics. In April Gorbachev started swinging reluctantly in this direction, but soon the hardliners' short-lived coup of August 18-21 precipitated the final collapse of the federal government's and Gorbachev's authority, and, in December, the end of the USSR.

FROM THIS necessarily condensed analysis of complex processes, we see that popular disaffection with Soviet imperialism and communism played an indispensable role in the USSR's disappearance. It provided essential electoral votes for the nationalists, intellectuals, and Yeltsinites who led the opposition. It provided the bodies needed at key physical demonstrations of popular will. In some industries, especially mining, it supported strike actions that seriously undermined the resolve of the government at key moments in the summer of 1989 and February-March 1991. And in various ways it subverted the will and reliability of the "organs of coercion," without which the USSR could not survive. Most of its actions can be characterized as semi-legitimate revolts against the status quo, not as conscious revolutionary activity.

None of this is to say that popular disaffection was a "bigger" factor in the collapse than others. Nor is it to say that there was some inevitability about the USSR disintegrating six years after Gorbachev took over. The country would probably have survived longer if Gorbachev had died or been ousted early on, if he had used somewhat more repression from a fairly early stage, or if he had taken Sakharov's advice in 1988 and started negotiating a more liberal union treaty two years earlier than he actually did. Ethnic nationalism posed the most acute threat to the USSR's survival, and Gorbachev's mix of policies probably enabled it to break the country up more rapidly than any other set of policies would have. In the short run the loss of life was relatively small, but in the longer term the rapid and virtually uncontrolled collapse of the Soviet "internal empire" seems likely to produce exceptionally baneful consequences. □

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One Who

In August 1977, Bernard Levin wrote the following in The Times, *London.*

WHY DO I believe that Brezhnev and his colleagues have seen the writing on the wall, and know that the message it conveys is exactly the same, word for word, as the original slogan that gave us the metaphor? Why...do I believe that a new Russian Revolution is inevitable, and that it may come much sooner than anyone would now dare to hope?

It is because I do not believe it possible that the thirst for freedom and decency in the countries of the Soviet Empire can remain much longer unslaked, and that any attempt either to quench it by total repression or to satisfy it by real reforms, will be cataclysmically destructive of the eroded foundations of the entire State system. If it is to be repression, the economic consequences will be appalling, and even more appalling will be the resistance it will provoke. And if it is to be reform, there will be no stopping the tide once the first sluice has been opened. Memories of the Czech tragedy of 1968 will still be fresh...the most significant element of the Prague Spring was the way in which, once Mr. Dubcek had shown that he supported the Czech desire for liberation, no attempt by him and his equally brave colleagues to go slowly proved availing—the scent of freedom in the nostrils of his people was too strong.

But, it will be objected, Czechoslovakia was an occupied and enslaved land; what the Czechs wanted was what the Dutch and the Belgians and the French wanted in 1943—liberation from their hated conquerors. How can that be said to apply to the Soviet Union herself?

In the first place, it applies to a considerable extent in exactly the same way. Perhaps the most powerful of all the dissident movements has been the one fueled by nationalist feeling: Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Uzbeks, Estonians, and other national minorities there are struggling, their national pride all the stronger for decades of repression, for what they see as their birthright (though they should not expect the United Nations subcommittee on Colonialism to sympathize). Released from its iron bottle, the force of this feeling could be devastating—indeed, could not be otherwise, which is why the Soviet authorities have for so long feared it most and treated it most cruelly. But although it is expressed only through the mouths of a few exceptionally brave individuals, the feeling lies dormant in millions, like an underground reservoir of oil, only waiting for the bore to come though from the surface to erupt in a roaring fountain.

But even apart from the latent pressure of nationalism there are latent pressures, similarly given form and a voice only by an exceptionally courageous few, which must similarly gush forth if the rock is ever struck. Is it seriously to be believed that the only Christians in Russia are the ones we know about? Will anyone maintain that the only seekers after elementary human rights there are the ones whose names are familiar here? Can anyone think that the only people who would like to get out of that vast prison are the ones who ask for permission to do so? What do you suppose Christianity *is*, what do you imagine freedom *means*, what do you think emigration *represents*, that it can be confined to a few? It is simply

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Got it Right

not credible that forces which have moved men and women in countless millions throughout the ages exist only in sketchy form in the Soviet Union, in the hearts of the few who speak openly of them. The charge is there, packed tight, tamped down and waiting. The fuse is laid. All that remains is the match.

Nor, as it happens, is it particularly difficult to see who will strike it, and why. I do not know his name or what he looks like, but I know he is there. For do you seriously suppose—now we extend the same questions into another area—that Mr. Dubcek and President Svoboda and Mr. Pelikan and Mr. Goldstuecker and Professor Sik and the rest of the Czech liberationists who led the doomed revolt came up one night like mushrooms, or arrived in a rocket from Outer Space? They came up through the system, through the system installed and maintained in Czechoslovakia, and most carefully monitored, by the Soviet authorities. But no Soviet tracker-dog could pick up the scent of the contraband they carried, for they carried it in their souls, where no dog's nose is sensitive enough to detect it.

And if you tell me that no such figures exist in the Soviet Union, even more completely unknown outside (or for that matter inside) than the Czech heroes were, I shall tell you in return that it simply cannot be so. The odds against such an extraordinary aberration of the human spirit are so preposterously high that the chance can be ignored with impunity. They are there, all right, at this very moment, obeying orders, doing their duty, taking the official line against dissidents, not only in public but in private. They do not conspire, they are not in touch with Western intelligence agencies, they commit no sabotage. They are in every respect model Soviet functionaries. Or rather, in every respect but one: they have admitted the truth about their country to themselves, and have vowed, also to themselves, to do something about it.

That is how it will be done. There will be no gunfire in the streets, no barricades, no general strikes, no hanging of oppressors from lamp-posts, no sacking and burning of government offices, no seizure of radio-stations or mass defections among the military. But one day soon, some new faces will appear in the Politburo,—I am sure they have already appeared in municipal and even regional administrative authorities—and gradually, very gradually, other, similarly new, faces will join them. Until one day they will look at each other and realize that there is no longer any need for concealment of the truth in their hearts. And the match will be lit.

There is nothing romantic or fantastic about this prognosis; it is the most sober extrapolation from known facts and tested evidence. That, or something like it, *will* happen. *When* it will happen it is neither possible nor useful to guess; but I am sure it will be within the lifetime of people much older than I. And when it does happen—let us suppose, for neatness' sake, on July 14, 1989—you must, in all civility, allow me to be the first to repeat Charles James Fox's words on their two hundredth anniversary: How much the greatest event it is that ever happened in the world! And how much the best!

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Part II

Sins of the Scholars

Richard Pipes

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1917 and the Revisionists

Richard Pipes

IN THE 1970s and 1980s self-proclaimed "revisionists" in the field of Soviet history took over many of the leading university chairs in the United States, England, and Germany, and by means of patronage more appropriate to politics than scholarship, imposed their views on students and professional organizations. The consequence has been a stultifying form of "political correctness" in the writing and teaching of twentieth-century Russian history. Such thought control is a new and highly disturbing phenomenon with no obvious parallel in any other branch of historiography, save possibly Black studies.[1]

"Revisionism" originally referred to the views of Eduard Bernstein, who a century ago called on the German Social-Democrats to abandon Marx's theory of revolution as invalidated by events and adopt in its place an evolutionary ideology. More recently it has come to define diverse schools of Western historians who challenged the traditional views of their countries' histories by employing a class approach close to but not slavishly imitative of Marx's. (In the German field it has been applied to those pseudo-academics who deny that the Nazis carried out a program of mass extermination of Jews, but that is another matter.) One of these schools has made it its mission to reformulate the view of Soviet history prevalent in the West, in order to supplant it with what it claims to be a more balanced and less politically motivated interpretation. In practice, the "revisionist" conception of the origins of the Soviet state comes close to that promoted by the now defunct communist establishment.

Revisionism emerged in the United States and England in the 1960's, when all the branches of the social sciences underwent radicalization. Its methodology was inspired by the French *Annales* school and the writings of the British radical historian and publicist, E.P. Thompson, especially his *Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Derivatively, it was, of course, influenced by Marx and Engels. It was the onset of detente, when the hostility toward communism was being softened by the quest for an understanding with Moscow, an attitude which led to emphasis

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[1]The revisionists do not confine themselves to the Russian Revolution and its immediate antecedents. Professor J. Arch Getty, for example, has attempted to reshape the prevailing perception of the 1937 Yezhov terror by minimizing Stalin's personal responsibility. (See his *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party reconsidered, 1933-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.)) Such efforts, however, have not found favor with mainstream revisionists. This essay will deal only with revisionism insofar as it affects the history of the Russian Revolution.

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of its positive features and attribution of responsibility for the Cold War to the West.

These shifts in Western opinion happened to coincide with changes in the direction of Soviet historiography that followed the accession of Brezhnev in 1964, when Soviet scholars were told to devote greater attention to the historic role of the "masses," especially industrial labor. (This role had been minimized under Stalin who preferred to give credit for Soviet successes to the party and himself). Through contacts with Soviet academic institutions which encouraged their endeavors, the revisionists gained access to some archives. During Gorbachev's perestroika a few found sufficient approval in Moscow's eyes to have their books and articles published in the Soviet Union.

Before proceeding to the tenets of revisionism, something needs to be said about its political ramifications. On the face of it, events that had occurred in distant Russia decades ago are not a subject likely to exercise Western academics. If some of the latter nevertheless have come to feel passionately about them, it is because the origins of the communist state bear directly on its legitimacy. If the Soviet state had come into being as the result of a conspiracy, as argued by traditional Western and non-Communist Russian historians, then its claim to rule was tenuous at best. If, on the other hand, it had been conceived in a popular revolt then it was a legitimate government with which the West had to come to terms, regardless of its feelings about it. To demonstrate the need for accommodation with the communist regime, the Western revisionists, like their counterparts in the USSR, felt the need to assert both the legitimacy and the permanence of the Soviet state with reference to its allegedly popular beginnings. In other words, the motive animating the revisionists was not so much intellectual curiosity as political zeal, namely a fervent dislike of anticommunism and the so-called "Cold War" policies to which it was said to give rise.[2]

It is easier to determine what the revisionists are against than what they are for, because their movement is quite diffuse and at times contradictory. They are largely agreed in rejecting the image of October 1917 as a *putsch* carried out by a conspiratorial party against the wishes of the "masses" or, at any rate, without their active participation: for them, it was an inevitable and popular uprising. They reject the concept of "totalitarianism" on the grounds that it portrays the Communist elite as manipulating a passive populace. As far as methodology is concerned, they insist on viewing events "from below," that is, looking for the prime mover of history in the masses, principally industrial labor.[3] They denigrate politics and ideology, which, like the Marxists, they view as belonging to the "superstructure."

Such are the shared beliefs of the movement. On other issues, the revisionists display considerable differences. The radical wing sympathizes with communism, at any rate, in its ideal form. The majority in the middle is attracted to socialism and is prepared to defend Lenin and his regime. On the right, a body of fellow-travellers subscribes to the methodology of the revisionist school without sharing all of its views. The borders of the movement are blurred and better defined by its animosities than its convictions.

And these animosities are strong: like the early Bolsheviks, the revisionists are broad-minded toward their own kind but ferociously intolerant of outsiders. Their combativeness, their unwillingness to seek common

[2]The revisionists without exception favored accommodation with the USSR and rejected the hard-line policies pursued by Washington. They were, therefore, not apolitically motivated, as they liked to claim, but merely inspired by their own brand of politics.

[3]The concept of writing "history from below" was popularized by the British communist historian, George Rudé, the author of *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (1959) and *The Crowd in History* (1964).

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ground with their predecessors and members of other schools, suggest a disturbing absence of a genuine scholarly spirit. Natural scientists, who provide the model for modern scholarship, treat their discoveries not as invalidating older theories but as extending or qualifying them: hence they customarily pay homage to their predecessors even as they advance beyond them. In the social sciences, by contrast, perhaps because they are not really sciences, other manners prevail: a spirit of partisanship which expresses itself in a readiness to denigrate forerunners. The revisionists, for one, are no strangers to ad hominem arguments, always a reliable indicator of intellectual insecurity.[4]

UNTIL THE emergence of revisionism, the prevailing view of the origins and course of the Russian Revolution, shared alike by non-Communist Russians (e.g. Sergei Melgunov) and Western scholars (e.g. Bernard Pares, Leonard Schapiro, Robert Daniels) rested on the following propositions: 1) the late czarist regime, although weakened by internal conflicts, was making rapid progress in both the political and economic spheres. Its collapse was brought about by the domestic strains of World War I; 2) despite its best intentions, the democratic intelligentsia which took over in February 1917 was incapable of running the country, causing it to fall prey to anarchy; 3) the Bolsheviks, the best organized and most determined party, took advantage of this anarchy to topple the Provisional Government and seize power. Immediately after this coup, they proceeded to lay the foundations of a one-party dictatorship.

The earlier generation of historians concentrated on politics because they regarded the crisis that led to the collapse first of czarism and then of the Provisional Government to have been primarily political in nature. This does not mean, however, as the revisionists pretend, that they ignored social issues: the image of pre-revisionist historians focusing on politics to the exclusion of all else, the target of revisionist attacks, is a straw man. All professional historians of the Revolution are aware that the struggle for power in 1917 played itself out against the background of peasant seizures of land and worker seizures of factories. What the traditionalists do not accept is that the social unrest of 1917 led directly and inevitably to a Bolshevik victory. The outcome of the unrest, in their judgment, was determined by conflicts between small elites, and if the Bolsheviks triumphed it was not because they enjoyed greater popular support but because they were better organized, more power-hungry, and less scrupulous.

As is the case with all historical generalizations, this one cannot be proven to everyone's satisfaction. But it needs to be stressed that the issue dividing traditional historians from the revisionists is not whether social factors played a role in the Russian Revolution—no one denies that—but whether they determined its outcome. While it is untrue that traditional historians of the Russian Revolution ignore social developments, it is unfortunately true that the revisionists concentrate on them with a single-mindedness that causes them to disregard the Revolution's political and ideological aspects. The result is a two-dimensional picture in which live human beings capable of making decisions are replaced by abstract "masses" acting out a script written for them by History.

The relationship between political, intellectual, and social factors is by its very nature a complicated subject, with sometimes one factor, sometimes another serving as the

[4]Thus Professor Moshe Lewin of the University of Pennsylvania saw fit in a newspaper interview to warn against me and my views: "You don't give Russia to the Poles: they don't think straight." (*Boston Globe*, May 18, 1991). This ethnic slur would be merely offensive were it not also ludicrous, given that Professor Lewin happens to be himself a native of Poland.

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prime mover. The historian never confronts a stark choice: for him, the problem is always one of emphasis. But while there are occasions when the population at large is minimally involved, it is difficult to conceive of a situation in which politics are irrelevant, as the revisionists would have it, because for politicians politics is a full-time occupation, whereas for the masses it is a sideline. Tenured academics, accustomed to receiving their monthly checks while doing pretty much what they like, seem to have difficulty acknowledging that ordinary people earn a living by daily labor, which means that their involvement in revolution or any other political activity must of necessity be intermittent and brief. This simple reality goes a long way towards explaining why every social upheaval sooner or later runs out of steam and politicians take over. As we shall see, the revisionists' neglect of politics prevents them from explaining why, immediately after an allegedly popular October 1917, Russia fell into the hands of a one-party dictatorship.

CHALLENGING THE consensus, the revisionists assert 1) that the breakdown of the czarist regime was not caused by the World War, since it was already fatally weakened by social unrest; 2) that October 1917 was not a coup d'état but a mass revolt in which the Bolsheviks followed rather than led the masses; 3) that the one-party dictatorship which sprung up in Russia after October was not a natural consequence of either the ideology or political practices of the Bolsheviks but an unwelcome deviation necessitated by events outside their control.

We shall take up these propositions one by one.

The thesis that czarism was destined to fall from social strife was first advanced in 1964-65, at the dawn of the revisionist movement, by Professor Leopold Haimson of Columbia University in an essay that has since acquired the status of a canonic scripture.[5] The author claimed that already on the eve of World War I czarist Russia's urban and industrial centers suffered unrest of such intensity that the country was heading toward revolution. To prove this thesis, Professor Haimson relied heavily on evidence indicating a marked increase in industrial strikes in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the war.

The increase in strikes in pre-1914 Russia is not in dispute: it undeniably took place. Whether this fact is indicative of social destabilization and a portent of revolution, however, is another matter. It so happens that all the leading industrial countries, England and the United States included, had the same experience at the same time:

> The wave of unrest and mass strikes which swept the western world between 1911 and 1913, stimulated by discontent among semi-skilled and unskilled workers, was in part inspired and led by men who had been influenced by anarcho-syndicalist ideas and in part a spontaneous manifestation of tendencies which served to strengthen the syndicalist movement.[6]

In the West, these strikes did not produce revolution. In Russia, where a revolution did occur, it may seem natural to assume a causal connection between the two phenomena, but the assumption is all the same logically flawed, an example of the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* ("after it therefore because of it") fallacy.

Of course, no one will ever be able to prove conclusively whether or not the czarist regime was doomed, war or no war. The volume of Western investment in Russia before 1914 suggests that some hard-headed businessmen thought it a safe haven for their money. The fact that the village after 1908 was calm and, by Russian standards, relatively prosperous, served as a powerfully stabilizing factor in a country in which peasants out-

[5] *Slavic Review*, December, 1964 and March,1965.

[6] Lewis L. Lorwin in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, xiv (New York, 1944), p. 498.

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numbered industrial workers 33 to 1. This writer's personal view is that czarist Russia probably would have collapsed even without a war but for political rather than economic or social reasons, namely the inability of the court and the bureaucracy on the one side, and the intelligentsia on the other, to reach a political compromise. A country of such size and with so diverse a population, with a poorly developed national and civic culture, could not attain stability without a workable constitution, and such a constitution was not in prospect because of the implacable enmity between those who ruled and those who aspired to rule.

The central role of politics in the Russian Revolution becomes apparent when one scrutinizes the events of February 1917. Notwithstanding the inflation and shortages which produced great unhappiness among the inhabitants of the cities, the crisis did not erupt for economic or social reasons. The unpopularity of the czarist regime in the winter of 1916-17 was first and foremost due to its inept conduct of the war and persistent rumors of treason in high places. The turmoil forced Nicholas to abdicate: he did so because the generals advised him it was essential if Russia was to stay in the war. It was a political decision taken for political reasons, and it completely altered the face of Russia which had been traditionally held together by the person of the monarch.

Similarly, the two events that had the most direct bearing on the collapse of the Provisional Government—the ill-fated June offensive and Kerensky's quarrel with General Kornilov—were not social in nature although by weakening the government they exacerbated social unrest.

WE NOW COME to the heart of the dispute, the Bolshevik power seizure: was it a putsch or was it a revolution?

The official revisionist "line" on October 1917 was laid down in the February 1983 issue of the *American Historical Review* by Professor Ronald Suny of the University of Michigan. The authoritative tone of the essay, "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution," was disagreeably reminiscent of the instructions that, in days now happily past, Communist Party organs used to dispense to the Soviet historical profession. Professor Suny declared that October was a social revolution and hinted that anyone denying this self-evident truth had to be under the influence of political motives.

What made these peremptory judgments doubly disturbing was that the author had given no evidence then, or for that matter since, of having studied the original sources of the revolution in Russia: his specialty is Transcaucasia, and all four of his books deal with this borderland area. Even so, he felt no inhibition in dismissing as "politicized" the work of a generation of scholars who had worked in the primary sources, suggesting that their true purpose was to contest the legitimacy of the Soviet government. These insinuations he made with reference to the authority of others, scholars of his own political preferences, the soundness of which he was in no position to verify. Judging by some appalling factual mistakes, his knowledge of the events was not only second-hand but also inaccurate: thus, he depicted the June and July 1917 anti-government manifestations in Petrograd as "independent," although both were demonstrably organized by the Bolsheviks; he linked Kerensky with Kornilov; and he invented a fictitious "storming" of the Winter Palace by 20,000 armed Bolshevik supporters.

The true revisionist expert on this subject is Professor Alexander Rabinowitch of Indiana University, the author of *Prelude to Revolution* and *The Bolsheviks come to Power*.[7] Both books argue that the events leading up to October were driven from below: far from manipulating the masses, as traditional historians would have it, the Bolsheviks were

[7] *Prelude to Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1968); *The Bolsheviks come to Power* (New York: Norton, 1976).

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manipulated by them. The July 1917 riots, which Lenin and Trotsky themselves had obliquely conceded to have been a half-hearted and unsuccessful power grab, are depicted as a spontaneous explosion of popular fury which the Bolsheviks did their best to restrain—the thesis mandatory in Communist historiography since Stalin had first formulated it immediately after the events.[8] According to Professor Rabinowitch, in the three months that followed the July riots, the Bolsheviks maintained intimate contact with the masses and constantly adjusted their tactics to reflect their wishes.

Rabinowitch, one of the regulars of American-Soviet academic exchanges, summarized as follows his thesis at an international historical gathering held in Moscow in 1984: "October...was a profoundly popular, democratic movement" in which "the Bolshevik party as a whole expressed the fundamental interests of the masses."[9] This so pleased his Soviet hosts that they rewarded him with one of the deputy chairmanships of a committee set up to pursue the study of the "Great October Socialist Revolution" under I.I. Mints, the sturdy warhorse of Stalinist historiography. Four years later, Moscow brought out a translation of Rabinowitch's revisionist classic, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power.*

There is no mystery why the Communist *nomenklatura* should have insisted on the "popular" and "democratic" nature of the upheaval that had brought it to power. Lacking either czarism's traditional mandate or a popular mandate validated by elections, they had to have recourse to a nebulous historic claim of support by an abstraction called "the masses." It is less apparent why a Western historian, not subject to party controls, should embrace such a fatuous claim.

For the facts bearing on the circumstances under which the Bolsheviks took power show it to be devoid of substance. Even the chief managers of October, Lenin and Trotsky, did not pretend (except in a rhetorical fashion) that they responded to popular clamor and were carried to power on the shoulders of the masses. Lenin instructed his followers in Russia to arm the workers for a rising against the Provisional Government at the beginning of March 1917, the instant he had learned in Switzerland of the February Revolution; he justified his startling strategy in the "April Theses" on returning to Russia four weeks later. This stance he assumed before the population had had time to become disenchanted with the new order: it was an *a priori* political decision inspired by the conviction that the liberal and socialist intellectuals running the Provisional Government were both inept and weak. The wishes of the "masses" did not even enter his calculations.

Lenin altogether did not believe in popular revolutions. In July 1917 he wrote: "in times of revolution it is not enough to ascertain the 'will of the majority'... we see countless instances of how the better organized, more conscious, better-armed minority imposed its will on the majority and conquered it."[10] These words would seem to range Lenin on the side not of the revisionists but of their opponents. In September and October 1917, while hiding from the police and out of touch with the day-to-day activities of the Bolshevik Central Committee, Lenin sent it urgent letters demanding that an armed insurrection be carried out without further delays. Never mind the Second Congress of Soviets, which his followers wanted officially to proclaim the new regime:

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[8]See, for example, Z.V. Stepanov, *Iul'skie sobytiia* (Leningrad, 1967), p. 107.

[9]*Voprosy istorii*, No. 2 (1985), p. 164. This pronouncement from the most authoritative source of the school on this subject demonstrates how wrong is Professor Orlando Figes when, seeking to defend the revisionists, he denies that they believe "October was a genuine mass revolution driven from below": *Times Literary Supplement*, November 20, 1992, p. 19.

[10]V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xxxiv, (Moscow, 1962), p. 40.

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no revolution waits for votes. Seize power and then we will take care of the rest. Unless you act promptly all will be lost. These were not the counsels of a man who saw himself as a tool of the people. Lenin's sense of urgency was due, above all, to the fear—justified by subsequent events—that the elections to the Constituent Assembly, scheduled for mid-November, would reveal the Bolsheviks to be a minority party not empowered to speak in the name of the "masses."

During the night of October 10, the Bolshevik Central Committee finally resolved to seize power. The decision was taken in deepest secrecy: when, a few days later, in a newspaper interview, Kamenev revealed Bolshevik intentions, the outraged Lenin demanded that he be expelled from the party. This was the behavior of a classic conspirator rather than of someone acting in response to pressures "from below."

It may be added that in conversations with foreigners, for example the German Ambassador to Soviet Russia, von Mirbach, and Bertrand Russell, Lenin did not attribute his success to popular support. He explained it, first and foremost, by the disunity of his rivals and the superiority of Communist propaganda.

As for Trotsky, the man who actually directed the October coup, he estimated that the numbers involved in Petrograd were "at most" 25,000 to 30,000 persons.[11] Given that the capital city at that time had 400,000 industrial workers and a garrison of over 200,000 soldiers, this figure means that the Bolshevik power seizure was actively backed by at most 5 percent of the two groups in whose name it was carried out—hardly an overwhelming majority but rather the "better organized, more conscious, better armed minority" on which Lenin counted to "conquer" the majority.

In sum, the central argument of the revisionist school does not hold up on the evidence supplied by the very leaders of the October 1917 events. It is no more than a rehash of the interpretation inflicted on the Soviet historical profession by the Communist Party. It adds nothing to the commonplace theme of countless Communist accounts, of which the following is a fair example:

> The great victory in October 1917 was won, first of all, by the heroic working class of Petrograd, which, acting under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party headed by its leader, V.I. Lenin, carried with it, in the struggle against the rule of the bourgeoisie, the broad mass of soldiers and sailors....The struggle of Petrograd workers revealed with immense force and clarity the role of the working class as the main, vanguard force of the liberational movement of all exploited and oppressed against the rule of the bourgeoisie... The workers of Petrograd gave an example of skilful application of Bolshevik tactics, which demands great flexibility in the choice of methods and forms of the class struggle. [12]

These words were published in the USSR in 1965, eleven years before Professor Rabinowitch arrived at a similar conclusion and presented it to Western readers as a discovery.

THE REVISIONISTS, like the Communist historians, assign the leading role in the events of October to industrial workers.

They and their doctoral students turn out, year in, year out, weighty monographs laden with tables and footnotes, on the workers of Petrograd, the workers of Moscow, factory committees, industrial strikes, worker Red Guards, and such like. The heroes of these studies, however, never come to life: the reader has the impression that the

[11] *Istoriia russkoi revoliutsii*, II, Pt. 2 (Berlin, 1933), p. 319.

[12] Z. V. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniia Oktiabr'skogo vooruzhonnogo vosstaniia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1965), pp. 283-84.

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authors have never met a real, flesh and blood, factory worker. They appear as pallid abstractions, like the noble savages of eighteenth-century *philosophes*, and, like them, unexceptionally noble. The revisionists seem to assume a very unfair distribution of virtue among the classes, with all goodness concentrated in the working class. It took courage for a young historian to break ranks recently by pointing out that Russian industrial labor had a penchant for violence and played a prominent role in pogroms of Jews.[13] It is symptomatic of the revisionists' lack of interest in live human beings that they have not bothered to write a biography of a truly revolutionary worker like Alexander Shliapnikov, the head of the pro-Bolshevik Metallurgical Union, Lenin's principal agent in Petrograd during World War I and his first Commissar of Labor. This neglect contrasts vividly with the attention which they lavish on Bolshevik intellectuals like Alexandra Kollontai, Shliapnikov's mistress, a feminist writer from an affluent family, who is the subject of no fewer than three lives in English alone.

To what extent were Russia's industrial workers really Bolshevized? The figures are available, and they indicate that in the fall of 1917 a mere 7 percent of Petrograd workers belonged to the party; the nationwide proportion was lower still (5.3 percent).[14] With somewhere between 1 in 15 and 1 in 20 of Russia's workers in its ranks, the Bolshevik Party can hardly be said to have represented the working class or to have enjoyed its overwhelming support. In the October 1917 events in Petrograd only a tiny proportion of the city's "proletariat" was involved.

True, in the elections to the Constituent Assembly many workers voted the Bolshevik ticket, but the meaning of this vote demands explanation. The Bolshevik Party won the electoral support of a good proportion of industrial labor by promoting the slogan of "worker control." They encouraged the creation of Factory Committees to replace the national trade unions, dominated by their rivals, the Mensheviks, and incited workers to take over factory management. "Worker control," however, was an anarcho-syndicalist slogan which the Bolsheviks held in contempt even as they exploited it for tactical ends, implementing Lenin's strategy of mobilizing all potential enemies of the Provisional Government.

Because they neglect intellectual history, the revisionists are ill equipped to find their way through the thicket of political programs and slogans. Unlike European radical historians, who are likely to have undergone an apprenticeship in Marxism, American revisionists are largely innocent of ideology: essentially, their ideological equipment consists of liberal sentiments. This causes them to misunderstand the very social movements on which they lavish so much attention. Ignorant of the history of European syndicalism, they misinterpret the movement for factory control as indicative of sympathy for Bolshevism.

The Bolsheviks exploited the trend for worker control, as they exploited the Socialist-Revolutionary program of land socialization in order to court the peasants, and the slogan of national self-determination to win over the ethnic minorities. None of these promises they intended to honor and all of them they violated after coming to power. The factory committees did not survive for long: having served their purpose, they were abandoned in favor of conventional management practices. Here lay the seed of the conflict between the Bolshevik regime and the labor movement that broke into the open in 1920-21, a conflict that simply cannot be explained in terms of the analysis of 1917 provided by the revisionists.

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[13]Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes and Pogrom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). In 1921, according to Zinoniev, a considerable proportion of Petrograd workers espoused 'Black Hundred,' i.e. monarchist and anti-semitic, sentiments: *Desiatyi s' ezd RKP (b): Stenograficheskii Otchet* (Moscow, 1963), p. 347.

[14]Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, pp. 47-48.

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THE GREATEST difficulty of all that the revisionists confront is in attempting to explain how a mass revolution instantly turned into a one-party dictatorship. For, according to its chronicler, revisionism perceives a "profound discontinuity" between an "essentially popular revolution" and the "highly authoritarian regime which emerged" from it.[15] Here little guidance was provided by Communist historians who denied that Lenin's government was a dictatorship and never came up with an explanation of Stalin that made sense to a Marxist believer in historical "inevitability." When pressed, the revisionists blame the collapse of "Soviet democracy" on the Civil War, but they neither demonstrate how this transformation occurred nor explain why, once the Civil War ended in 1920, Soviet Russia failed to revert to its supposed democratic origins. They also ignore that the Bolsheviks took power with the explicit intention of unleashing a civil war, so that it cannot be treated as an historic *deus ex machina* which upset their plans.

This failure of revisionist historiography invalidates its entire image of October 1917. For it is inconceivable that in a matter of weeks, or at most months, the masses, had they really been the force behind October, would have meekly surrendered power to a party that, judging by the elections to the Constituent Assembly, represented less than one-quarter of the nation. The only explanation that makes sense is that the masses were, as the traditionalists would have it, only marginally involved, mainly as a destructive force, and that October was, indeed, a putsch by a party bent on monopolizing authority.

The reason for the one-party dictatorship lay not in the exigencies of the Civil War but in Lenin's openly stated determination to make a revolution from above, that is, for the people but not by the people, and then to monopolize in his hands legislative, executive and judiciary authority. In essence he followed the political strategy of Louis August Blanqui, the mid-nineteenth-century French radical, the leading proponent of power seizure by conspiracy. The inevitable consequences of a revolution made in this manner were evident already to Engels, who wrote in the 1870s:

> From the fact that Blanqui conceives every revolution as a coup of a small revolutionary minority follows the necessity of a dictatorship after success has been attained: obviously not the dictatorship of the entire revolutionary class, the proletariat, but of a small number of those who had carried out the coup...[16]

The revisionists seem as unfamiliar with these ideas as they are with those of anarcho-syndicalism and for the same reason, namely neglect of ideology and intellectual history.

But even thus handicapped there is no reason why they should be puzzled by the outcome of October, since documents from the time of the Revolution carry predictions to this effect. There are the numerous warnings of liberals and socialists that Lenin was bent on becoming a dictator. Some of Lenin's own associates realized that as well. When, on November 4, barely one week after the successful coup, Lenin refused to admit Mensheviks and Socialists-Revolutionaries into his government, four Bolshevik commissars resigned their cabinet posts. They explained their action in an Open Letter in which they stated that a government composed exclusively of Bolsheviks could maintain itself in power only by means of "political terror" which would result in "the removal of mass proletarian organizations from the management of political life, the establishment of an irresponsible regime, and the destruction of the Revolution and the country."[17]

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[15]Edward Acton, *Rethinking the Russian Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 204.

[16]Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, xviii (Berlin, 1962), p. 529.

[17]I. N. Liubimov, ed., *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda: Khronika Sobytii*, vi (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930), pp. 423-24.

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By insisting that politics do not matter, the revisionists have managed to lose sight of this simple reality.

THE REVISIONISTS, viewing themselves as a community, like to "interact." This they accomplish by consulting one another on work in progress, commenting on each other's writings, as well as consorting at colloquia, seminars, and conferences to which they invite exclusively those of a similar persuasion or, at least, neutrally disposed. Their mutual admiration occasionally assumes mawkish forms as illustrated by the following passage, more appropriate to a high school yearbook than a scholarly monograph, from the introduction to a book jointly written by two prominent revisionists, Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg:

> Diane thanks Bill for his remarkable generosity and unfailing good spirits...Diane will miss the interaction...Bill also feels very fortunate to have had the chance to work with Diane...Although happy to bring this project to a close, Bill regrets very much the end of these rewarding interactions...[18]

Of course, there is nothing wrong with friendly collaboration, except that, once it becomes a habit, it has a tendency to promote "group think." Creativity is rarely the result of collective effort: it derives from individual illumination which too much "interaction" extinguishes.

This may well account for the mediocrity of the revisionists' product: one rarely finds in their writings departures from the canon, sudden flashes of inspiration that surprise the reader by fusing disparate elements into a startling whole. They pile fact on fact, statistic on statistic, all buttressed with a weighty apparatus of scholarly references; but they lack an essential quality of good historians, which is the ability to distinguish the significant from the trivial. They treat all facts and figures as of equal importance, apparently hoping by their sheer mass to overwhelm the reader into accepting their conclusions. Not only is there no humanity in their writings, but also no life, no sweep, nothing to excite the imagination. The style is plodding; the narrative (what little there is of it) flags. To someone who has spent many years in university teaching, this material conveys the unmistakable flavor of "B," or even "C,"quality work.

A CHARACTERISTIC feature of the revisionists' methodology is concentration on a small, select number of topics which, in the judgment of its adherents, serve to prove their theses. They deliberately ignore a whole range of subjects which to contemporaries, if one is to judge by memoirs and the daily press of the period, constituted the very essence of the Revolution. To list them all would require a prohibitive amount of space. The following are examples of subjects which they do not treat: the history of rural Russia, especially after 1917; radical terrorism before 1917; the role of liberals in the revolutionary upheavals of 1905 and February 1917; the incitement of popular discontent by parliament (the Duma); the contribution of the Germans first in financing the Bolsheviks' march to power and then in helping them stay in power; the Constituent Assembly; the workers' rejection of the Bolsheviks in the Spring of 1918; the Red Terror; the persecution of the church; the nationwide peasant uprisings against the Communist regime in 1919-21; the 1921 famine which claimed over 5 million lives. Episodes which in the judgment of nearly all the participants, the Bolsheviks included, played a crucial role in the Bolsheviks' ascent to power, such the Kornilov affair, are brushed aside merely because, being political, they do not lend themselves to being studied "from below."

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[18] *Strikes and Revolution in Russia*, 1917 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. xvii-xviii.

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Any determinist historian can, if so inclined, adopt a particular methodology and by concentrating exclusively on subjects that fall within its purview, produce a coherent and convincing account—convincing, that is, in its own terms. One can explain historical events as being determined by ideas, by economics, by the masses or, alternatively, by "great men," and so shape the narrative that the desired results are obtained. But history is all these things and at various times one factor or another is of decisive importance. A critical skill of the historian lies in the ability to distinguish which specific factors, at any given time, drive events. The revisionists postulate that the course of the Revolution was determined by the "masses." Ignoring all alternative explanations, they have no difficulty corroborating their claim. The self-confirming nature of this procedure has occurred to Sheila Fitzpatrick, who, although one of the founders of the school, displayed a self-critical spirit foreign to most of its members, when she suggested "that our new methodology and sources tend to produce revisionist conclusions."[19] Unfortunately, she did not pursue this thought to its logical conclusion.

Because of their very limited range of interests, the revisionists have been unable to come up with a fresh interpretation of the Revolution as a whole. Their one attempt, by Sheila Fitzpatrick, turns out to be quite conventional and in some respects, even un-revisionist.[20] A comprehensive account of this subject cannot be written from the revisionist perspective for the simple reason that human history embraces not only that which lies "below" but also that which, so to speak, lies in the middle and at the top. It was very well for such *Annalistes* as Marc Bloch or Fernand Braudel to downplay politics, because they dealt with subjects of *longue durée*: in Bloch's case, several centuries of feudalism in Western Europe, in Braudel's, the Mediterranean basin during the 42-year reign of Philip II of Spain.

In such vast spatial and chronological frames, impersonal processes do overshadow events and relegate politics into the background. But when the subject is a single year, or at most a few years, in one country, and, to a large extent, in the major cities of that country; when the issue at stake is gaining control of the government, how can politics be ignored?

THE COLLAPSE of communism in Russia has dealt the revisionist community a blow from which it is unlikely to recover. In theory, of course, it is possible to decouple 1917 from the regime that emerged from it: to depict the one as a rising of the "popular masses" and everything that followed as a deviation from the revolution's true course. But psychologically this is a hard thing to do. For much as the revisionists may criticize Stalin and his successors, their movement was born of admiration of the "Soviet achievement" and revulsion against anticommunism. It was the survival of the communist state against all odds and its alleged success in solving social problems besetting the capitalist world that led to the glorification of the Bolshevik coup, not the other way around.

The revisionists have been perplexed, and in some cases shattered, by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the triumph on its ruins of the despised anticommunism. One of their more radical representatives, Professor David Mandel of the University of Montreal, the author of two studies of workers in Petrograd in 1917, has published a running commentary on the events of 1989-91 in Soviet Russia which strike the reader by its inability to make sense of what was happening. Observing the abortive putsch of August 1991 Mandel notes that Yeltsin's sup-

[19]In Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 387.

[20]*The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

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port was thin: the number of Muscovites actively backing him in these critical days did not exceed 100,000, leading him to wonder what the other 8.9 million Muscovites were thinking.[21] This is the same author who, writing of October 1917, when the numbers of persons actively backing Lenin was proportionately not much greater, saw the workers giving him "overwhelming support."[22]

The revisionists still receive moral help from those older Russian historians who have been unable to break out of the mental straitjackets imposed by decades of regimentation. But these die-hards are a vanishing breed. Yeltsin, Russia's first democratically-elected head of state, has outlawed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the historical grounds that it was not, and never had been, a political party in the true sense of the word but a mechanism for controlling the state. Soon there will be no one left in Russia to help sustain the politically driven old version, save for the "brown-red" coalition composed of reactionary nationalists, local counterparts of Germany's neo-Nazis.

There is yet another reason why the demise of communism bodes ill for the revisionist case. The Yeltsin government has made nearly all archival repositories, including the Central Party Archive, previously open only to the most trusted party personnel, available to all scholars, native and foreign, pro-communist and anticommunist. These collections had been previously closed for no other reason than that they contained evidence embarrassing to the Communist regime. A good part of these documents relate to the leadership's political concerns and decisions. The release of this material is certain both to mar the picture of the benevolent Bolsheviks acting on behalf of the masses and to reveal their preoccupation with politics.

The revisionists like to think of themselves as youthful rebels. But time does not stand still and the youths of the 1960s have now reached comfortable middle-age. A new generation of rebels is knocking at the gates. As Turgenev observed in one of his plays, the vanguard quickly turns into the rear-guard—all it takes is a change of direction. And it will not be long before the direction does change: when the next generation of Russian historians goes on the offensive, compelling yesterday's revisionists, along with members of the old Soviet historical establishment, to defend their own brand of orthodoxy.

Unfortunately for the revisionists, their legacy is not likely to amount to much. As the old adage has it, what is true in their writings is not new, and what is new is not true. Quite apart from the fact that the political implications of their argument have been robbed of both relevancy and appeal by the collapse of communism, their self-imposed limitation to ignore nine-tenths of the stuff of history dooms them to remain monographers and nothing more: brick-makers without an architectural vision. Their inability to come up with an original survey of the Russian Revolution suggests that their exertions are unlikely to contribute more than a footnote to future histories—a footnote that will tell more of Western intellectual trends at the end of the twentieth century than of events in Russia at its beginning.□

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[21]David Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People* (Montreal-New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), p. 4.

[22]David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power* (London: St. Martin's, 1984), p. 312.

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A Fatal Logic

Martin Malia

THE GREATEST surprise of the end of the twentieth century has been the suddenness and completeness of the Soviet system's collapse. After three quarters of a century of communist expansion, and forty-five years of Cold War contest for global hegemony between "socialism" and "capitalism," the world had settled into the view that although the Soviet Union might not be eternal, it was at least permanent. Yet in the short span from 1989 to 1991 the whole Leninist edifice imploded without any of its guardians offering any serious resistance to the debacle. The most militant political movement of the modern age, which in its time had made a career of armed insurrections and minority *coups d'état*, at the end proved capable only of the pitiful farce of August, 1991. This raises the question of why the seemingly superpuissant Soviet Union suddenly turned out to be so fragile. Why did the effort of perestroika to reform the system lead instead to its demise? Was this outcome due to mistakes of the Gorbachev era, or did its causes lie farther back in the system's history?

It has been said that the real question about the end of the Roman Empire was not why it finally fell, but why it lasted so long. Analogously, though the Soviet system nowhere near matched Rome in longevity, we may nonetheless say that the real question about its end is not so much what triggered the collapse as why the system lasted even the seventy-four years it did.

In this perspective, the real importance of Sovietism's abrupt demise is that it tells us something about what the system had been all along, something we had failed to appreciate when we were convinced it was permanent. For the Soviet case is unprecedented in the annals of imperial decline: other cases, such as the Ottoman Empire, Ching China, and Rome itself, showed remarkable durability in decrepitude, whereas the Soviet Union displayed a unique vulnerability at the very height of international power.[1]

The cause of this can only be a unique and enduring structural fragility of the system. If Soviet communism collapsed like a house of cards, it was because it had always been a house of cards. Since this assertion contravenes the conventional wisdom of mainstream Western Sovietology, a preliminary statement of what it involves is in order.

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[1]The collapse, or more exactly the withering away, of the British and French empires was also fairly rapid, extending over some fifteen or twenty years. But these overseas colonial empires are really a case apart from all those mentioned above, since they did not possess a centralized, bureaucratic structure ruling over a contiguous block of territory.

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Briefly put, what the Soviets were trying to accomplish was from the very beginning impossible. For let us recall that their aim was nothing less than to bring history to its culmination and its final perfection with the "building of socialism"; thus they understood socialism in its maximalist sense as the fullness of equality in the stateless, classless society, the overcoming of all alienation, and the passage of humanity "from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom." These metahistorical goals, moreover, were to be achieved through an instrumental program of suppressing private property, and with it, profit and the market, through the dictatorial agency of a "scientifically conscious" Party.

Achieving such an "end of history," however, is not within the realm of human possibility, so the Soviet goal could be pursued only through a mixture of ideological illusion and raw coercion. But eventually the illusion could not fail to be perceived as such, and the will to coerce would accordingly evaporate; and when this occurred the whole jerry-built structure of what Brezhnev called "really-existing socialism" would come precipitately tumbling down. In this perspective, it is indeed a marvel that the Soviet regime managed to preserve the illusion for three quarters of a century vis-à-vis both its own people and the outside world, and through all the vicissitudes of endemic economic crisis and ceaseless international strife, whether cold or hot.

Before it is possible to develop this explanation of the Soviet system's permanent fragility, two preliminaries must be addressed. First, it is necessary to give a fuller description of the nature of the Soviet system, or to provide a "model" of what it was in its time. Even so, the model proposed below will be a relatively abstract affair, concerned with the general structure of the Soviet system and the logic of its historical development, with only a minimum of empirical references to orient the argument. Second, in order to propose such a model, it is necessary to make a critique of the models, or generalizations, with which we have operated throughout the Soviet system's seeming permanence. For explaining Soviet fragility is a problem only because most of our earlier models hitherto had posited the system's basic stability, indeed its capacity for successful reform.

The Rise and Fall of a Model

THE OUTSIDE world's perception of the Soviet system has gone through three main phases. The first extended from the October Revolution to the Second World War, a time when the West was still trying to make up its mind about the nature of the new order in the East. The second phase comprised the twenty years after the Second World War, during which the dominant model of explanation was "totalitarianism." The third phase extended from around 1965 to perestroika, and it was dominated by the concepts of "modernization" and "institutional pluralism."

The first phase saw the creation of the Soviet system under Lenin and Stalin and its testing in total warfare. During this time the Soviet enterprise was viewed as an "experiment," either in the building of a new and truly human civilization or in the creation of a monstrous dictatorial power, depending on one's point of view. But in either case, the emphasis was on changeability and the possible impermanence of what was being built; and indeed, until 1945, through the oscillating fortunes of War Communism, the New Economic Policy (NEP), the first Five-Year Plans, and then near-defeat in war, it was by no means clear, even to the Soviet leadership, where they would wind up, or whether they would survive at all. Moreover, during this time the outside world had a paucity of hard data on Soviet conditions—for instance, it knew almost nothing about the disaster of collectivization, or even the existence of the Gulag—and often it was not disposed to believe what data it did possess. As a result,

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there emerged no significant body of scholarly or analytical literature about the Soviet phenomenon, and there were certainly no "models" in circulation; instead people made do with the term "experiment" if they were favorably disposed to the Soviet adventure, or "dictatorship" if they were hostile to it.

The second phase of the outside world's perception of the Soviet system began with its victory in 1945, the acquisition of an East European empire, and the emulation of its example in China, North Korea, and North Vietnam. This second wave of communist revolution seemed to demonstrate that the system was not only permanent, but was also an expanding, and possibly a future dominant force in world affairs. This change meant, at the least, that the outside world would have to take the Soviet system most seriously in order to learn to live with it; but more often than not, this change indicated that Soviet power must be feared and hence analyzed in order to resist or combat it. Thus a new academic discipline was born: Sovietology. And this discipline developed as luxuriantly as it did because its emergence coincided with what might be called the revolution of the social sciences in post-war academia.

It was only after the Second World War that the disciplines of economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology, in gestation since various periods in the nineteenth century, came together in separate faculties of social science and special research institutes to form a third great area of learning alongside the established natural sciences and the humanities, while at the same time the venerable discipline of history was transformed under the influence of the newcomers' approaches and techniques. All of these disciplines shared, to some degree, the ambition of making the study of man and society as exact and scientific as possible, very much in the positivist spirit of the father of sociology, Auguste Comte—if not, of course, in accordance with his precise doctrines. And the methodologies of this panoply of disciplines were brought to bear on the burgeoning study of the Soviet system, first under the modest rubric of "area studies" and later under the more ambitious and scientific-sounding name of Sovietology.

It is because of this circumstance that the new discipline came to deal in "models"; and the first model to dominate the field was that of "totalitarianism." Later, when this concept fell from favor, it was alleged that it was a product of the Cold War, an intellectual weapon in that struggle rather than an analytical tool of true social science, and as such the academic equivalent of anticommunism in politics. In fact, however, the term totalitarianism long antedates the Cold War. It even antedates the hegemony of institutionalized social science, taking its origins in the liberal reaction to the new authoritarian politics of the 1930s.

The genealogy of the term is by now well known.[2] Mussolini first described his new order as "total" with a positive connotation; and by the end of the 1930s opponents of fascism and Nazism had taken up the term in a negative sense to brand all the new dictatorships as totalitarian. This conflation of Nazism with communism, which in the revisionist 1960s came to be judged scandalous, at the time appeared to be fully justified by the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939. The Second World War put this equation and the label "totalitarianism" in parentheses in the West, but both reappeared again almost immediately after 1945 as Stalin consolidated his hold over Eastern Europe by means of the so-called "people's democracies," thereby leading to the Cold War. Again, in the 1960s, revisionists sought to reverse the immediate post-war perspective and held the West equally to blame for this new cold conflict. Yet the basic fact stubbornly remains that if the West was frightened by communist expansion, this was because it was in fact frightening; and if Stalin's power was called totalitarian, this

[2]See Abbot Gleason, "'Totalitarianism' in 1984," in *The Russian Review*, vol. 43, 1984.

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was because it was indeed as total as state power can be.

Thus the term totalitarianism, in its heyday, was by no means just a Cold War epithet—although it was of course often used in simplistic and polemical fashion, and it invariably carried a negative charge. Nonetheless, this vexed term is the most apt, succinct designation of what was in fact a novel and alarming phenomenon in human affairs; nor is there is any reason to be positive about the Stalinist, or even the post-Stalinist, Soviet order.

Whether this qualifies "totalitarianism" as a scientifically precise "model" or not is another, and not very important, matter. Various definitions of the term were given in the early years of Sovietology, and significant nuances of meaning can be found in the literature. The most important is that in origin the term was a humanistic and literary one, as in Arthur Kessler's *Darkness At Noon* (1941) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948), and even in Hannah Arendt's historical-philosophical treatise, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951); whereas it became a formal social-science "model" only with the work of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski—*Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*—in 1956. But the time is past when these preliminary efforts at grappling with the problem of the nature of Sovietism are of immediate relevance.

What remains now, and will no doubt always remain, of the totalitarian designation is two things. The first is that the communist organization of power is a new and unique phenomenon in history, far surpassing in its intensity and degree of control all previous forms of despotism, tyranny, autocracy, or authoritarianism; in other words, past political precedents or contemporary political comparisons will not help greatly in understanding Sovietism. The second is that under communism all aspects of human activity—economic, social, cultural, even private life itself—are subordinated to the political purposes of ideological state power. In other words, with Sovietism we are dealing with a total system, an all-embracing and interrelated whole; and this is what defines the Soviet system's historical uniqueness, and still another reason why cross-cultural comparisons with other, "normal" societies are more often than not misleading.

It is these two aspects of the totalitarian designation that the dissidents of the people's democracies and of the Soviet Union had in mind when they first took up the term in the 1970s, precisely at the time when it was coming under suspicion in Western Sovietology.[3] This is the meaning conveyed by the now routine use of the term throughout the ex-Soviet world: even Gorbachev came to employ it casually to describe the order he presently alleges he always wished to undo. This is the characterization of Sovietism suggested when, during the system's decline, dissidents claimed that their goal was to live some day in a "normal society": what they meant was not so much a society of Western-style affluence—although they meant that too—as a society free of the omnipresence of ideological politics. This is the sense in which the term will be used, and defended, here.

And the term very much needs to be defended, because in the third phase of Sovietology after 1965, the totalitarian model was increasingly repudiated in favor of modernization theory. Again, there are various definitions of modernization and different emphases within modernization theory, but this is secondary to the fact that the late 1960s witnessed a "paradigm shift" away from taking politics and ideology as the key to the communist phenomenon towards making society and economic development the centerpiece of the Soviet story. The Soviet system was no longer studied primarily "from above," as a projection of the politi-

[3]For a fruitful effort to update the concept of totalitarianism, especially in the light of the dissident experience, see Guy Hermet, ed., *Totalitarismes* (Paris: Economica, 1984).

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cal will of the Party, but "from below," as in large measure the product of the "developmental" imperatives of "backwardness". The Soviet trajectory came to be viewed, in the words of a famous essay, as a progress "from utopia to development,"[4] in which the ideological trappings of socialism eventually served only to foster a "special type of politically forced development." A concomitant of this change was held, by other authors, to be the mellowing of totalitarianism into ordinary authoritarianism, and the emergence of "institutional pluralism" among the various "interest groups" of the system, a situation in which the Party assumed the role of referee or honest broker. Thus the Soviet system, in the eyes of mainstream Sovietology, evolved from a regime into a genuine society.

There were many causes of this change of perspective. First, after Stalin's death in 1953 the Soviet Union in fact changed notably, abandoning mass terror and opening up partially to the outside world. Although the Cold War did not end—it would last as long as the Soviet regime itself—it assumed a more controlled form through summitry, arms control, and episodic detente. And internally, the system indeed softened and "de-ideologized," somewhat as the modernization thesis maintained, although this process did not signify that the system had become "mature" and "stable," as the concept of modernity also suggested.

But just as important, the post-1965 "revisionism" in Sovietology was more consonant with the regnant social science culture of Western academia than was the political and ideological emphasis of the totalitarian thesis, which now came to appear abstract and superficial. For the idea of social science necessarily posits that something called society, all-encompassing and coherently structured, is the fundamental human reality. Society, therefore, cannot be capriciously molded and mauled by a mere political regime driven by airy ideas. To be sure, in the social-scientific perspective, politics and ideologies do play a role, but essentially as subsets of the more basic, global entity of society. The Marxist distinction between base and superstructure is simply one, if probably the most influential, expression of this perspective; and in Soviet Studies, Marxism has been particularly prominent, as in various efforts to show that major developments from the October seizure of power to Stalin's first Five-Year Plan were the products of worker activism. But the subordination of politics and culture to a more basic society is a far broader intellectual phenomenon than explicit or residual Marxism; it is fed by a whole range of influences from structural-functionalism to the *Annales* school. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the very idea of social science is in some measure reductionist in this sense. Thus sooner or later the totalitarian model was bound to lose out to modernization in Western Sovietology.

Yet it is precisely for this reason that mainstream Sovietology fundamentally misunderstood the true nature of its subject. For the social science perspective necessarily posits that "society" is essentially the same everywhere. That is, although there are enormous differences in time and place among actually existing (as Brezhnev might say) social formations, all are governed by the same general laws of structure, function, and development: otherwise, one could not have a science of society. Modernization theory, interest group theory, conflict theory, and so forth are all constructs with such universalistic pretensions. In fact, however, they are not universal at all, but hypostasized generalizations from very specific conditions in societies that modernization theory itself calls "developed." As a result, when they

[4]The theme of a seminal, and at the time very penetrating, essay by Richard Lowenthal, "Development versus Utopia in Communist Policy," in Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1970).

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were projected unto the Soviet system they did not explain its peculiar dynamic; rather they reduced it to something similar to the truly developed world and so actually obscured the real nature of the system. Thus the historical uniqueness of Sovietism was blurred, and the total nature of the system dissolved into discrete segments. In short, we no longer had that surreal entity which the inhabitants of the Soviet world once contrasted with the "normal society" outside. We were left simply with another path to a common, universal modernity. But it is sufficient to contrast the structureless rubble of the ex-Soviet Union with South Korea and Taiwan, or even Brazil and Mexico, to see that modernization and development become useless categories if they are stretched to apply to all these cases; and they can to nothing to explain the startling outcome of the Soviet adventure.

This is not to say that the measure of mainstream Sovietology's failure is that it did not predict that outcome. No one predicted the form, and still less the time, of the Soviet collapse—although a number of observers, particularly East European dissidents, saw that the system was so fatally flawed that someday it would end rather than evolve into a more perfected form of existence. The measure of mainstream Sovietology's failure, rather, is that its categories could not account for the collapse after it had occurred. For most varieties of modernization theory-cum-institutional pluralism implied—and often explicitly stated—that the Soviet system, for all its flaws, was basically a success; that it had created an "urbanized, industrial, educated society," as the litany went, and that this society, therefore, was capable of "reform" or evolution beyond totalitarianism, through authoritarianism, and into some sort of socialist democracy. This is why the retrospective cult of Bukharin and the NEP figured so prominently in revisionist writing and why the field, almost unanimously, went so wild over "Gorby," who was supposed to return the system, over the head of the Stalinist "aberration," to the "Bukharin alternative" and thus make the whole experiment at last turn out right.[5]

But this most decidedly did not happen: rather, the attempted reform of the system known as perestroika caused the whole structure to disintegrate. And all the categories of mainstream, modernization-oriented Sovietology most decidedly cannot account for this untoward denouement. This point bears emphasis because it does not seem to have sunk in yet;[6] until it does, Western study of the post-Soviet world will remain seriously impaired.

This is all the more distressing because the mechanism of the communist collapse is really quite easy to grasp, and many in Eastern Europe did, in fact, grasp it. The leaders of Solidarity saw quite clearly that their conquests of 1980-1981 were just a step toward the eventual liquidation of the system. During perestroika Milovan Djilas declared that communism was not reforming itself, but was disintegrating.[7] But perhaps the most telling of these prognoses was that

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[5]Some of the classic statements to this effect are Stephen Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Rethinking the Soviet Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), reprinted as *Stalinism and the Seeds of Soviet Reform: The Debates of the 1960s* (London and Armonk, NY: Pluto Press and M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1991) and *idem*, *The Gorbachev Phenomenon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988 and, in an updated version, 1991).

[6]This emerges clearly from the defense of Sovietology contained in *Post-Soviet Affairs* (formerly *The Soviet Economy*), (July-September 1992).

[7]Milovan Djilas and George Urban, "Djilas on Gorbachev," *Encounter* vol. 71 (September-October 1987): pp. 3-19.

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of Andrei Amalrik, who foresaw as early as 1969 that the Soviet Union might well not survive until 1984, a view dismissed in the West at the time as fanciful. He took the same evidence of liberalizing change that appeared as progress to the "privileged members of the Soviet intelligentsia" and to "the Americans" and turned on its head, or more accurately, set it rightside up again so as to give it its real meaning. The grand illusion of these two groups, he wrote, is "the ideology of reformism [which] is founded on the idea that progressive changes and partial reforms, the replacement of an old bureaucratic elite by a new one, more intellectual and endowed with good sense, will produce a sort of humanization of socialism; and that in the place of an immobile system without liberty will appear a dynamic and liberal system." In fact, however, "it would be more accurate to view the incremental increase in liberty as, in reality, the advance of the regime's decrepitude."[8]

The fact that Sovietology as a would-be social science mistook decrepitude for development should point up two lessons: First, Sovietism cannot be understood in terms of putatively universal categories of social action; it requires a special set of categories of its own, and these are still best summarized by the term totalitarianism as defined above. Second, Soviet communism has been, or should have been, the great case study of the modern social sciences; yet the application of its existing categories to the Soviet data has yielded more obfuscation than enlightenment. So perhaps the Sovietological debacle should serve as a starting point for some methodological revisionism in the social sciences across the board.

The Logic of Socialism

THE SPECIAL categories necessary for grasping the peculiarities of the Soviet phenomenon must be sought in the Soviet experience itself. There is no need to import "models" to substitute for that experience; the relevant analytical concepts may all be derived by generalization from the declared goals and the historical institutions of the Soviet system.

To begin with, the relevant basic concept is not modernization, or even totalitarianism; it is socialism. "Building socialism" is what the Soviet Union was all about, as its leaders never ceased to proclaim. We should take this claim seriously and not reduce it to the banal and ubiquitous phenomenon of "development." Still less should we dismiss Soviet ideology as no more than hortatory rhetoric, necessary to spur a backward, peasant country to industrialization. Socialism, rather, is the grand utopia of the modern age, both East and West, and in countries at all conceivable levels of development.

But in the course of time since the term socialism first emerged in the 1830s, it has acquired so many different, and often incompatible, meanings that it is necessary to state at the outset which one is under discussion here. Thus: the following remarks are concerned with socialism in its maximalist sense as the antithesis of capitalism; and this is roughly the same as revolutionary as opposed to reformist socialism. Communism, therefore, is not another species of society from this generic socialism; and it is no accident, or usurpation of terminology, that communist regimes have always called themselves the "socialist camp," or that Western Social-Democratic parties have usually recognized this claim, and thus regarded their domestic Communist rivals as part of the "Left."

It is also no accident that only Communist parties have ever "built socialism," whereas Social-Democratic parties, from Leon Blum and the Swedish SDs in the 1930s to Willy Brandt and François Mitterrand latterly, have always stopped short at a capacious "safety net" and a "social market." The reason is that democratic

[8]Andrei Amalrik, *L'union Sovietique survivra-t-elle en 1984?*, translated by Michel Tatu (Paris: Fayard, 1970), pp. 72-73.

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socialists always needed a majority before they could transcend capitalism; and since it is not given to most human beings to aim so high, these softer socialists had to give up and go to Bad Godesberg, as the German SDs did in 1959 when they abandoned Marxism. But Leninist parties were always willing to coerce human nature; and so they actually attained the institutional forms of maximal, or integral, socialism by suppressing capitalism. Yet all species of socialists commune in the great goal of transcending capitalism to one or another degree; and it is this common utopian aspiration that is under discussion here.

In this perspective, the term socialism designates first of all a moral idea; and the collectivist and "planned" institutional forms that we usually consider to be the essence of socialism derive from that idea, and have meaning and legitimacy only in terms of it. Only if this moral basis is recognized is it possible to account for the extraordinary emotional charge that has always surrounded the socialist project. The essence of the moral idea of socialism is that human equality is the supreme value in life; the subordination of man to man in the social division of labor is therefore a scandal; and the chief end of politics consequently should be to remove, or at least attenuate, it.

It is for this reason that if one is ruthlessly logical about democracy, one arrives at the idea of socialism. Mere equality of political rights and the equality of all citizens before the law are not enough to make men equal in fact. For this, social and economic equality are necessary, an objective that requires the intervention of the state. Since the 1840s, in its milder form this policy has been called social democracy and in its most consequential form, communism, with the major practical differences that have already been noted.

Furthermore, since all forms of society until now have been radically inegalitarian, achieving integral socialism would be the culmination, or the end, of history, which is to say the final perfection of the human condition. Thus the original moral idea of socialism also implies a teleological theory of history, articulating a logic of progress.

The moral postulate of human equality, moreover, necessarily entails a certain type of instrumental social and economic program. Although birth and hereditary rank are one source of human inequality, as under the *ancien régime*, its basic, universal source is found in differences of wealth, which are also automatically differences of power. The practical, instrumental program of socialism therefore consists in the equalization of wealth by political means; in other words the subordination of economics to politics.

There are, of course, various degrees of radicalism in implementing such a program, from progressive taxation and a universal welfare state to outright nationalization and planning of the entire economy. And all of these forms have been called socialist, a circumstance which goes far to explain the already-noted confusion that has perennially surrounded the concrete meaning of that term. In its most logically consequential form, however, socialism means the absolute end of private property. As Marx put it in *The Communist Manifesto*, "The theory of the Communists may be summed up with a single phrase: Abolition of private property."

And from this it also follows logically that the tainted product of private property—profit—must also be abolished, for profit invariably rests on the "exploitation of man by man." Concomitantly, the means for realizing profit—the soulless market—must also be suppressed, for market relationships are inherently unequal and therefore exploitative. Thus private property, profit, and the market are designated as "capitalism"; and it is significant that the term capitalism is not to be found in Adam Smith, David Ricardo, or any of the classical economists, but is a neologism of the late nineteenth century, put into circulation by socialists to designate their adversary. Moreover, it is the drama of the supersession of capitalism by socialism that furnishes the *telos* of historical progress.

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In this world-historical drama, finally, it is only logical that the most deprived, exploited, and dehumanized class—the propertyless proletariat—should be the great redeemer, the liberator of humanity as a whole from all forms of class inequality, and from the executive agent of the old possessing classes, the state. Thus history is brought to its culmination, and humanity to the transition "from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom," through a "proletarian" revolution to overthrow "capitalism."

It is by this series of quite logical steps that the moral idea of socialism yields, first, a political program for the revolutionary seizure of power in the name of the people, and then a program for the suppression of private property, profit, and the market in the name of the new socialist order. And this is exactly what the Bolsheviks did under Lenin and Stalin. No other "model" than the logic of socialism itself is required to explain the bases of the Soviet system. The wellspring of that system, therefore, is in ideology, and its functioning is incomprehensible independently of this fact.

WHY THEN DID the system develop not only so as to contravene the moral impetus of the socialist idea, but also to produce what its recent subjects now consider a totalitarian monstrosity, which, moreover, ultimately did not work? What perverse "cunning of reason" (to adapt Hegel's terminology) presided over the Soviet tragedy? The answer to this paradox, in brief, is that the experiment ended in tragedy because the logic of socialism does not, in fact, correspond to the logic of history—if indeed history possesses an overall logic at all. The course of history, therefore, had constantly to be molded by the coercive power of the state. The second wellspring of the Soviet system, thus, is found in political coercion, which was always primary with respect to social and economic forces.

After 1917, consequently, the hand of history was forced by the intervention of a special instrument, Lenin's "party of a new type," with which he declared he would "overturn all Russia." In the Bolshevik view, the Party was necessary to articulate "scientifically" the revolutionary "consciousness" of the proletariat and guard it against succumbing, after the manner of the "petty bourgeoisie," to the mere "spontaneity" of their immediate economic interests.

The Communist Party thus came to substitute both for the proletariat and for the logic of history; and this substitution furnished the basic institution of the Soviet system—the Party-state. But this entity was no ordinary or "normal" state, an institution which even in its most authoritarian or despotic forms remains in significant measure distinct from society. This was a total state that substituted for society.

For it did everything. It did not just manage or regulate the economy; it *was* the economy, an arrangement known as the Plan, but better described as the "administrative-command system." It did not govern society; it replaced it as an autonomous, "civil" entity, thereby reducing the population to an atomized mass of powerless individuals, an undertaking necessitating the ubiquitous power of the Police. It did not just monitor or censor culture; it created an ersatz class culture expressed in a wooden ideological language that was the only tolerated idiom. And the Soviet state did all this because it was in fact only the instrument of the Party; and that body was no ordinary or "normal" party, but an ideological war-machine dedicated to "building socialism."

As a result of the substitution of the Party for the forces it claimed to represent, the initial ideocratic impulse of the system came to express itself as a "partocracy," as it is often called in the former Soviet Union. Thus if we must have a "model" for the communist phenomenon it might be called by the barbarous name of "ideocratic partocracy," for this is just what the Soviet system was in its day. And this is what made the system total or totalitarian, and why the terms

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authoritarianism, pluralism, and development are not only inadequate, but actually misrepresentations of the real Soviet world.

A Formula for Fragility

STILL, THE generalizations about totalitarianism that were current in the late Stalin era, and were quite apposite at that time, are no longer adequate to characterize the whole seventy-four year course of Soviet history. It is now necessary to give a more dynamic version of the totalitarian concept—as indeed was already the approach in the 1950s of such specialists as Merle Fainsod. For the Party-state of communism was not a static affair, nor did it ever succeed in realizing fully its aspiration to total control over, or displacement of, society. Since such total control is impossible, the Leninist regime was constantly at war with the recalcitrant reality of Russian society. It therefore proceeded by a succession of a "socialist offensives" followed by tactical retreats. And this rhythm will permit us to sketch a historical version of the totalitarian concept.

The Soviet dynamic began when the revolutionary coup of October 1917 was followed by the War Communism of 1918. This latter policy was both a regimen of military communism, or the mobilization of all resources to win the Civil War, and of militant communism, or a drive to forge the ultimate society immediately, in the class struggle with the Whites. And the means to achieve this was the maximal socialist program of full nationalization and suppression of the market.

But this first leap into the future failed: Russia was too devastated after six years of war to bear up under it, and the Party's coercive methods only devastated the country further. Thus in 1921, the Bolsheviks, with their economy and society disintegrating beneath them, retreated to the NEP, a quasi-market system, reluctantly adopted to provide a "breathing space" to permit the prostrate nation to revive.

From that time on the Soviet story was that of an alternation between the basic pattern of the system, War Communism, and temporary retreat to a neo-NEP. The original NEP indeed permitted the country's recovery; but its accommodation of the "petty bourgeois" peasantry also meant postponing the socialist goal indefinitely. Bukharin tried to rationalize this course as "growing into socialism," but a gradualist orientation to the peasantry clearly went against the grain of a revolutionary "workers'" Party. So Stalin, after 1929, reverted to a more basic Leninism and "built socialism" by the great revolution from above of the First Five-Year Plan—which created a permanent, institutionalized War Communism.

Through the forced collectivization of some twenty-five million peasant households, he extorted the "surplus value" for a crash program of industrialization designed initially to bring Russia up to the technological level of the West, and later to ready her for modern, mechanized war. Thus the logic of the mature Soviet system came to be the total mobilization of all human and material resources, and the full subjugation of culture, in order to generate economic power, so as to create military and political power, so as to extirpate definitively all "class enemies" at home and to break out of "capitalist encirclement" abroad. Thus the Soviet regime at last realized—as fully as it ever would—its totalitarian potential.

And this primitive, militarized organization of life worked, at least up to a point. After absorbing staggering losses in the Second World War, it eventually brought the Soviet Union victory, and then added an empire in Eastern Europe. It enabled a Soviet society that was largely still pre-modern and culturally hobbled to become a superpower. Its leaders long believed that its merits would some day shift the "correlation of forces" in their favor so as to bring victory over America in the Cold War.

But the cost of such a permanent revolution from above proved exorbitant. The

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institutionalized terror, the demographic hemorrhage of the Gulag, and the self-imposed isolation from the outside world of the Stalin regime could hardly be maintained indefinitely. Moreover, this system worked only for the cruder tasks of extensive development, the building of heavy metallurgy or mobilization for actual war. After Stalin's death, however, the system's hyper-centralized plan and "command-administrative" bureaucracy stifled creativity and so faltered in the transition to intensive development and the increasingly complex world of post-war technology. At the same time, the gap between the original moral ideal and the real performance had grown dangerously wide, and the original promises of socialism could not be put off indefinitely to the "radiant future." So new retreats became necessary for recuperation, indeed survival.

Thus Khrushchev inaugurated the great post-Stalin policy of reform communism. He demystified the Stalin cult of personality in the hope that this would strengthen the system, and discovered belatedly, especially in Poland and Hungary, that partial recognition of the truth only undermined the system. Brezhnev and Kosygin therefore retreated from political relaxation and tried instead a timid advance towards the market. But this deluded the Czechoslovaks into believing they could add political to economic liberalization, and so at last give "really existing" socialism a "human face." In answer to this challenge, a harsher communism was restored for twenty years, but this only led to debilitating "stagnation" and the threatened loss of superpower sinew. Awareness of this danger, in turn, led to the grandest attempt ever at a neo-NEP, Gorbachev's perestroika.

On this occasion, however, the breathing space produced not the system's revival, but its collapse. It did so because, if the socialist myth on which the system rested were to remain credible, the regime, at some point, had to produce concrete economic and social results for the population; but by the 1980s the results were so paltry that the myth had long since become a palpable lie.

Through the reign of Stalin, the system had seemed to produce spectacular economic results, though at the cost of endless crimes. Khruschchev and Brezhnev had curtailed the Party's criminal activities and introduced a rudimentary welfare system; but at the same time the crude administrative-command economy reached and then exceeded the natural limits of its viability, a development aggravated but not caused by the strain of the Soviet ambition to be an equal superpower with the United States. And in the midst of all this, now ancient egalitarian promises of "real socialism" appeared preposterous.

So, with glasnost, the freedom to tell the truth about the system, coming on top of a now decades-long failure to perform economically, destroyed what little remained of the ideological props that held the decrepit structure together. With ideology gone, the will to coerce evaporated too; the entire nineteen million-member Party and its superpower, multinational union imploded, without anyone putting up the slightest fight.

Thus the formula of the Soviet system's terminal fragility derives from the formula on which the system had rested from the beginning. A coercive ideocratic partocracy masquerading as an egalitarian social democracy is an inherently fragile affair, a permanent house of cards awaiting its natural fate: it had always been only a question of time before the fraud would be found out. So with the accumulation of practical failures, ideocratic credibility withered away from under the Soviet Party-state; and the partocracy, without the support of a living socialist idea to sustain its coercive power, proved incapable of maintaining itself and imploded. In retrospect, it is indeed a world-historical wonder that it ever lasted as long as it did. □

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Academe and the Soviet Myth

Robert Conquest

AS WE ALL KNOW, over the past half century an influential section of the Western intelligentsia became addicted, to a greater or lesser degree, to Marxism and even to Marxism-Leninism, though more often these days to a variety of sub-Marxist anti-democratic pseudologies. (I don't think "addiction" is too strong a word: perhaps someone will consider founding a curative organization called Marxists Anonymous).

At the same time, and mainly as part of this phenomenon, many academics became firm believers in a large array of falsehoods about the Marxist states, in particular the Soviet Union. Not all Marxists, indeed, believed the Soviet myth, though most of them did. And by no means all who misunderstood the Soviet Union were Marxists—though it is true that most of them had probably been affected to some extent by the Marxist tinge in the prevailing intellectual atmosphere.

Academics were not the only ones who were grossly and fundamentally deceived about both the facts and the motivations of the Stalin and post-Stalin regimes in the USSR, of course. Journalists like Lincoln Steffens, and (more cynically) Walter Duranty, and a dozen others; diplomats like Joseph Davies, United States Ambassador in Moscow; politicians like Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's chief adviser, and Vice President Henry Wallace: a whole spectrum of those responsible for purveying the facts, and so forming governmental and public opinion in America, played a major role. But still, the academics may in the long run have been the most influential in peddling falsehood, if only from their particular claim to special knowledge and to the disinterested pursuit of truth—and also from the fact that politicians, media, and public took this claim seriously, and each ill-informed politico or editor maintained a supposed expert to support his own preconceived opinions: a phenomenon not yet extinct.

IT WAS IN the 1930s, just when the Soviet system was in its very worst phase, that major validation of the enormous set of falsifications with which this was concealed came for the first time from Western academics of the highest standing.

The stars were, of course, Sydney and Beatrice Webb, the deans of Western social studies, leaders of the Fabian Society, founders of the London School of Economics. The motivations of the Webbs are clear enough, and may be divided into two main attitudes, which we find in different forms throughout Western pseudological writing on the Soviets. First of all, for them "Socialism" was the society of the future, in which government representing the people

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would provide a planned economy, with beneficial results. They thought they saw socialism in the USSR. And, of course, so they did. This led, as is normal in academic self-deception, to their excusing some of the undemocratic reality and denying the rest. As a result their work was of a genre common in literature, but hitherto never applied to a real country—Utopian fantasy.

The Webbs' second contribution was also to persist until quite recently in some academic circles: they accepted as true the facts, figures, and sundry claims published by the Communists. And they believed that the Soviet electoral system, trade unions, cooperatives existed in reality in the forms which in fact existed on paper only.

The Webbs' book ran to over 1200 pages, representing a vast amount of toil and research, all totally wasted. It was originally entitled *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?*: but the question mark was triumphantly removed in the second edition—which appeared in 1937, at precisely the time the regime was in its worst phase of gloomy, all-embracing terror. Their view of what they reckoned as the exile of a million odd families of 'kulaks' was that "the Soviet government could hardly have acted otherwise," and indeed that "strong must have been the faith and resolute the will of the men who, in the interest of what seemed to them the public good, could take such a decision." When it came to the artificial famine of 1933 in the USSR, whose mere existence was then denied by the regime but is now officially reckoned as having taken six or seven million lives, they maintained there was merely some local food shortage—due, anyhow, to 'sabotage' by the peasant population. On the faked Moscow Trials, they took the view that the confessions of the accused were due to their "behaving naturally and sensibly, as Englishmen would were they not virtually compelled by their highly artificial legal system to go through a routine which is useful to the accused only when there is some doubt as to the facts." The highly influential Professor Harold Laski, took a similar view, with particular praise for Stalin's villainous prosecutor Andrei Vyshinsky, who was "doing what an ideal Minister of Justice would do if we had such a person in Great Britain."

Another leading British academic of the period did not even have the Webbs' excuse of arrogant ignorance. Sir Bernard Pares, Britain's leading Russianist, had opposed the Soviets, but changed his mind on arriving in Moscow late in 1935, instantly feeling that the Bolsheviks "were Russia." He went on to believe the Soviet version of the 1936-1938 Moscow Trials, adding his own fatuous contribution—that "the bulky verbatim reports were in any case impressive." Once again, the inability to imagine that official documents could be a pack of lies, an inability we shall find that persisted even into the 1990s!

Over the 1940s and 1950s much truth about the USSR became available in the West, and there were a number of academics who were, in one way or another, directly and personally involved in the real politics of the war and of the post-war world, including the aspects involving the Soviet Union. For the best part of these two decades, the desk-bound professor of the pre-war period, who was to emerge again in the next academic generation, was much less in evidence. One of those writing at this time was Merle Fainsod who, in 1953, produced his excellent study *How Russia is Ruled* and revised it well in 1963. And here, alas, we are led into the modern period. After Fainsod's death, by a mischance too complicated to go into here, the task of producing a new edition fell to a young scholar, Jerry Hough.

An academic scandal well known in the Sovietological field ensued. Hough changed the title to the more polite *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, and used the prestige of the original, adding, "By Jerry F. Hough and Merle Fainsod. Revised and enlarged by Jerry F. Hough." But the 'revising' consisted of reversing and distorting the whole work.

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To take a particularly revealing example: Fainsod's index gives over sixty references to forced labor camps; Hough's revision gives none. Again, while Fainsod spoke of millions of victims of Stalinism, Hough gave a totally contrary view. I remember at Columbia University more than twenty years ago Stephen Cohen saying to me,"There's someone here who thinks Stalin only killed ten thousand people." "No there isn't," I said confidently. Steve took me over and said, "Jerry, how many people did Stalin kill?" "Ten thousand or so."

In his pseudo-Fainsod he takes the same view, though there and later admitting a possibility of "a figure in the low hundreds of thousands." Of course even then the real question was how many millions, or tens of millions, perished, as is now fully confirmed in Russia. A single one of the mass graves lately dug up in the former USSR holds as many as Hough's whole estimate. We should note that, parasitical on the success of Fainsod's original, Hough's version was—still is—a textbook for many students.

Hough (who, it may be noted, was one of the many Sovietologists trained in institutional and sociological formulations rather than in history) wrote of the Stalin period that "there is not...there cannot be—a society in which all power is concentrated in a few hands." He also described Brezhnev's Soviet Union in strange terms: "The Soviet system [is] a very participatory one"; "the regime has become more tolerant of individual iconoclasm, including political dissent, than it was...in the Khrushchev era"; "Brezhnev came to power promising normalcy, and it was a pledge that he kept"; the Soviet Union is "a parliamentary system of a special type." "Pluralist" was a phrase also much used, and not only by Hough. Hough is to be taken into account, if only because he still figures, (or did until very recently), as a guru on television and in the other media, consulted by the CIA, supported by one type of political scientist as just the verbal manipulator suited to their notions.

On any normal judgment, Hough is to some extent a freak, even among oddball Sovietologists. But he was an influential precursor of the 'revisionist' Sovietology which became vociferous in the mid-1980s. These 'revisionists' formed a group which claimed to present a truer picture of the Stalin period than that prevailing among what they called "Cold War Sovietologists."

In pre-democratic days, some of them were praised by reactionary Soviet writers as "objective"—a traditional Soviet expression meaning reasonably uncritical of the old official line. In the October 2, 1990 *Pravda*, the reactionary Professor Viktor Danilenko observed that there was a "new look" in foreign Sovietology. This was, he said, "welcome," for it had "sharply raised the prestige of the professors of Sovietology...Anti-Sovietism has begun to disappear from the works of contemporary Sovietologists."

As one who was myself categorized as recently as 1990 at a plenum of the Central Committee, by Alexander Chakovski, as "anti-Sovietchik number one," I consider myself well qualified to define what this anti-Sovietism that Danilenko complains about consists of:

a) we believed that the Stalinist experience was in its essence the imposition on the Russians and others of an extreme system of terror;

b) we believed that it was a gross aberration, and not a normal historical process;

c) we believed that the "Cold War" was waged by Stalin and his successors both against the West, and against the peoples of Russia and Eastern Europe. (We rejected the view that the Russian people were, generally, speaking, contented subjects of a political system different from, but no worse than, most others);

d) we believed that Soviet official documents were heavily falsified, and that samizdat, émigré and defector information, critically examined, was normally a better source.

Up to a point, Danilenko was right. By the mid-1980s, the older generation of

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Western Sovietologists was under criticism from the new stratum who revived the errors of the 1930s. J. Arch Getty's name was prominent among these latter, and his *Origins of the Great Purge* is a major "revisionist" text. It is also perhaps the most ludicrous book on the history of the Stalin period ever published. Getty regards "structural, institutional and ideological" matters as the important ones, and the purge as attributable to the "structural and factional" struggle within the party. He describes anti-Stalinists—even Khrushchev, let alone Roy Medvedev or Stephen Cohen or myself—as prejudiced.

Getty's general theme was that the terror had been fairly minor. He wrote (like Hough) of "thousands" executed and "many thousands" imprisoned. Playing down the extent of the terror was not the only point. He (and his *confrères*) also held that terror was not in any case of major importance, since institutional and social changes were the true essence of the period—though terror, affecting millions directly and the whole population indirectly, might also have been reasonably considered a social phenomenon. The revisionists were also interested in the rise of new cadres, though not in the criteria for their selection—servility, brutality, and coarseness of mind, constituting what is now called in Russia a "negative selection" of the new ruling class. Nor were the revisionists interested in the methods of personnel change, notably the denunciation and execution of predecessors. Others of this school wrote of the collectivization in a similar vein—that is, as a social change—and they praised the party emissaries from the cities who effected it—that is, bullied the peasants into submission.

Part of the trouble was that revisionists such as Getty were, like Hough, social historians by training, rather than historians in the fuller sense, and sought (in rather the same context as that which produced Marxism) the structural rather than the essential, the form rather than the content. In fact they worked to de-Stalinize Soviet history. This also led them, like the Webbs before them, into accepting official documents as better evidence than what they referred to as "anecdotal" accounts—that is, the first-hand testimony of actual witnesses which contradicted the official picture. As I have said, this unofficial evidence was in fact vastly superior to the official, and, even when not conclusive, was not simply one vast fake like the Communist product.

Getty himself thus called official documents "primary" and accepted them as against "personal accounts." He also argued that the Tukhachevsky case may have dealt with a real military plot, and devoted a special appendix to exculpating Stalin from responsibility for the Kirov murder. And so on, very often mistaking or misunderstanding even the official evidence. Getty thus exhibits the three main disqualifications for writing Soviet history shared by all his school. First, he discounts the mass terror. Second, he discounts the mass falsification. Third, he relies on the attribution of political and other prejudice to émigrés and others who told the truth, including those Western scholars who were able to use such evidence to give reasonably full and wholly fair accounts of reality.

Needless to say, allegations of prejudice cut both ways, and certainly the revisionist distortions are themselves the result of prejudices. Though these seem to include, in some cases at least, a residue of the Western Stalinist tradition of the 1930s, the main presumptions and preconceptions come from elsewhere. For above all, the mental faults were lack of imagination and lack of general historical knowledge, coupled with the mulish conviction that the Stalin period is amenable to the methods of social investigation often used in the West (it should be said, with not very helpful results there either).

These strictures apply to the work of two demographers—Barbara Anderson and Brian Silver—several times cited as "objec-

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tive" in the old USSR. They started with assumptions about quite different populations, applied these to the USSR, and found that evidence of high death rates there was implausible: a pointless exercise. Their objectivity, moreover, consisted in the acceptance as genuine of the faked census figures published in 1939, even after these had been demolished by their Soviet colleagues as containing millions who existed "only on paper." (Of course no remotely sensible researcher should have been believed that "census" for a moment even before glasnost, if only because the previous 1937 Census had been suppressed and the Census Board shot, after being publicly denounced as conspirators who had "worked to diminish the population of the Soviet Union"—adequate reasons for skepticism about its replacement, a little common sense might have suggested). Like other members of their sect, they apparently could not believe that statistics could be totally falsified, nor that millions of citizens could be slaughtered. Such things were outside both their own narrow range of experience and the scope of their imagination.

A plaint common to the revisionist position is that some of us allegedly used the "totalitarian model" in describing the Soviet Union. But this merely shows the limited nature of their conceptions. They assume that everyone has "models." In reality we used the word "totalitarian" (as a matter of fact I use it very rarely) as generally descriptive of Stalinist society. Leszek Kolakowski and Giovanni Sartori have argued at length that the word is indeed a useful one—and Gorbachev and Yeltsin have both employed it to describe the old Soviet system!

MYOPIC OBSESSION with official data often went hand in hand with an openly expressed desire to avoid the "judgmental." This has led, and not only in revisionist circles, to mediocrity in the teaching of Soviet studies. One result is that students have been actively discouraged from working in the profounder areas in which serious moral or political judgments are unavoidable, and encouraged to play safe with "objective" themes like cotton prices in Uzbekistan.

The idea is that opinions, especially strong ones, are incompatible with the most conscientious treatment of the facts. Historians of any sense have long known that this is an absurd error. Gibbon wrote of the fanatical Jansenist Tillemont that he was nevertheless completely "scrupulous" about evidence. Trevelyan saw that not "dispassionateness" but "good faith" was the real crux. The supposed neutrality of an academic is very often, in fact, no more than the acceptance of the unadmitted prejudices of his time or his circle.

One book—*Pluralism in the Soviet Union*, edited by Susan G. Solomon—put forth the view that:

> the building of real conceptual bridges between comparative politics and Soviet studies...would have demonstrated more forcefully than any argument that the Soviet Union was not an outsider in the family of nations, or pariah. And in destigmatizing the Soviet system, it would have moved specialists on Soviet subjects more squarely into the midstream of the discipline of political science.

A prominent British academic (Professor Alastair McCauly) similarly complained that a judgmental approach to Soviet history was "more reminiscent of propaganda than of social science," and added that, "Economists have learned more about resource allocation from a single issue of the official statistical handbook than from all the writings of Solzhenitsyn, Zinoviev et al." This was written in 1987, just before the official figures were publicly exposed as totally misleading in Moscow. Dozens of such statements could be quoted.

The whole question of Soviet economic strength had long been obfuscated in

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Western study. The leading French Sovietologist, Alain Besançon, pointed out in 1980:

> The Soviet economy is the subject of a considerable volume of scholarly work, which occupies numerous study centers in Europe and the United States and which provides material for a vast literature and various academic journals. But those born in the Soviet Union, or those who approach Soviet society through history, literature, travel or through listening to what the émigrés have to say, find that they cannot recognize what the economists describe. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between this system, conceived through measurement and figures, and the other system, without measurement and figures, which they have come to know through intuition and their own actual experience. It is an astonishing feature of the world of Soviet affairs that a certain kind of economic approach to Soviet reality, no matter how well-informed, honest and sophisticated, is met with such absolute skepticism and total disbelief by those who have a different approach that they do not even want to offer any criticism—it being impossible to know where to begin.

The fullest academic study, sponsored by the CIA, was wholly misleading, as Moscow analyses released a couple of years ago made absolutely clear. The CIA's experts did not, it is true, actually accept official Soviet figures. But they took them, since they were the only figures available, as the basis of their analysis, assuming that they were distorted or exaggerated in certain respects, but still useful. In fact they were not distorted, they were invented. Once again, there was a defect in the imagination of the Western researchers.

In *1984*, Orwell has Winston Smith reading of a Minister who announces triumphantly that 50 million pairs of boots have been produced last year. Winston Smith, quite apathetically and with no special political attitude, says to himself that for all he knows no boots at all were produced. Orwell understood Soviet statistics, academic economists didn't. I have more than once been asked in Russia how it was that a writer like Orwell grasped the essentials of the Soviet regime, while so many supposedly trained Western Sovietologists did not. The answer seems to be that he had the necessary imagination.

When you get to the real kooks, there is stuff even odder than the CIA's—as with the famous American economist John Kenneth Galbraith, in the true Webbian tradition, telling us in 1984 that the "Soviet system has made great economic progress in recent years...One can see it in the appearance of solid well-being of the people in the streets," adding that, in particular, unlike Western economies, the Soviet Union "makes full use of its manpower"—a staggering misstatement.

Of course, Soviet materials published in the late 1980s and early 1990s have now destroyed these and similar delusions. Or so you might think. But in doing so you would be underestimating the skill of the academic mind in devising evasive stratagems, or the staying power of mulishness and mediocrity. Even in the true sciences, deep intellectual investment in what turns out to be fallacy is not easily given up. Without frankly repudiating their errors, survivors of the revisionist writers now tend to concentrate on the period's detailed "documentation" at the lower level, which is now becoming available in the USSR. But in doing so, they characteristically take the view that statements made by activists and others in the localities represent evidence of "grass roots" feelings, rather than being at least somewhat constrained by the Stalinist ambiance. This work on such detail is not without its uses. But above all, it supposedly signals that the researcher is toiling away, is being scholarly—even when, in fact, his assumptions stultify his conclusions.

Meanwhile a last ditch defense by the misinterpretors of the USSR is that while those who took a soft view of the regime

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were mistaken, those who took a hard view believed the regime could not be changed. This is untrue. I and many others who took the hard view had continually expressed agreement with Orwell's remark that it would "either democratize or perish."

The Houghites of the profession now claim that they predicted the liberalization of the USSR. No: they said it was liberal already, and becoming even more liberal. And this they attributed to the political good will of the rising generation of rulers. No, the end of the old system was due to its complete inherent rottenness and non-viability and, when the facts left no alternative, its new rulers tried by new policies to save rather than to abandon the system.

WHAT WERE the plausible motivations for this whole intellectual disaster in Western academe? First, and certainly, fetishism of the word "Socialism." And with that, hostility to the West and to the United States in particular, manifested in praise of its opponents. This was in fact specially noticeable in the United States, where many second-level academics were 'radicalized' in their youth, during the period of the Vietnam War, developing a sort of Pavlovian reflex rejection of their own system.

Then, in the case of the younger lot, we see a desire to be original, to avoid endorsing established views. In the sense that it echoed the Webbs and other earlier dupes, the revisionist attitude was, indeed, not original. But it was original in dismissing the hard-won knowledge of a generation of researchers—indeed this is what "revision" means. Thus, in the early 1980s, it was "challenging" and appealing to editors who wanted "provocative" pieces; and so, in the long run, helpful in careers. Nor should we neglect mere vanity, the feeling that it would have been impossible for them to be deceived. And by the time some sort of notoriety, and academic position, had been achieved, so much emotional capital had been invested in error that absurdities could not be repudiated. As I have noted, such cases are not uncommon even in the exact sciences.

As to Marxism proper—of course this exerted a wholly destructive influence on serious study of the USSR or of any other polity, including our own. In its pure form, it will soon no doubt only be found, like the spotted owl, in a few sanctuaries on the Pacific Coast. But its remnants still distort the study, not only of the USSR but of practically all the humanities.

One remarkable phenomenon is that as the influence of Marxism started to collapse, it left an influential detritus, especially in the university literature departments, at a lower intellectual level still. Marx and Trotsky and Gramsci and Lukacs may have been fanatics and pseudoscientists, but at least they believed that rational discourse was possible, and held that some literature transcended class attitudes. Now we have the quasi-Marxism of deconstructionism and such. I have suggested elsewhere that Lenin's phrase "Left-wing Communism—an Infantile Disorder" might apply, except that in the present late period of the ideology it should be described as "A Senile Disorder."

Perhaps all this is because the academic mind prefers the comforts of unifying formulae to the discomforts of reality and of serious thought. The parochialism of believing that the USSR was not unlike Western polities was systematized in political science and social science formulae which did not cater for mass-terror and mass-falsification. "Objectivity" rejected the (true) evidence of actual experiences and accepted the (false) evidence of documents. All this is apparent among these revisionists. Among lesser beings there are words for it—stupidity and ignorance. These have been and are dangerous people. Insofar as they had an effect on public policy, it was thoroughly negative. Insofar as their work penetrated education, it was anti-educative. For these reasons alone their perpetrators deserve to be judged harshly, indeed more harshly than I have done here.

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The revisionists hold a number of academic posts. They have created a clique of like-misled, or indoctrinated, colleagues and students, and are to that extent a nuisance. Nor should one ignore the existence of those other academics who do not accept such attitudes, but who nevertheless try to find a "balance" between condemning and condoning the Stalinist and post-Stalinist experience. It is a sad story. But I should emphasize that though our tradition of misunderstanding and misrepresenting Soviet communism is an old and obstinate one, it never dominated the field. There are many sensible professors and researchers, and many more young graduate students, who pursue sound scholarship, and have the necessary judgment, knowledge, and imagination to reject the distortions here examined. □

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The Pluralist Mirage

William Odom

THAT GORBACHEV would choose policies that would accelerate the Soviet Union's demise was unpredictable. Unpredictable too was the timing of the final collapse. But that the Soviet system was decaying, that its structure prevented its transformation, and that Gorbachev's policies made its collapse likely were eminently knowable. If all political behavior could be precisely predicted, it would not be political. Having a degree of free will, political leaders can make policies that confound the shrewdest analysts. Sound political analysis, however, can reduce our degree of surprise at the consequences of policy-making. But too many Sovietologists managed to increase our surprise.

The reasons are manifold, but most of them derive from a common illusion among Sovietologists that the Soviet regime was evolving toward a pluralist form. In fact it was decaying because its structure obstructed liberal reform. "Getting it right" about "getting it wrong" about the Soviet Union requires that the varnish be stripped off that comfortable illusion.

Before applying the varnish remover, we should note that a few voices did get it right. In 1990, Martin Malia observed that "The false problem of how to restructure Leninism is now giving way to the real problem of how to dismantle the system, how to effect at last an exit from communism."[1] Two years earlier, Zbigniew Brzezinski published *The Grand Failure* which began, "This book is about the terminal crisis of communism."[2] Three years earlier Robert Conquest noted that Gorbachev looked like "a transitional ruler" and listed "collapse of the whole system" among possible outcomes.[3]

By the late 1980s, such judgments were not so remarkable for their prescience, but similar assessments appeared much earlier. In the late 1960s, Brzezinski edited a small book of essays on the question of the Soviet Union's "transformation or degeneration."[4] Of the fourteen contributors, six, including Brzezinski, Conquest, Merle Fainsod, Eugene Lyons, Giorgio Galli, and Isaac Don Levine, identified structural conditions that blocked pressures for change, and that could therefore lead to degeneration and collapse. Some were more cautious than others, but their common appreciation of structure and dynamics made them at least consider col-

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[1] "Z," "To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedalus* (Winter, 1990).

[2] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure* (New York: Scribner's, 1988).

[3] Robert Conquest, "What's Happening in Moscow?" *The National Interest* (Summer, 1987).

[4] Zbigniew Brzezinski, ed., *Dilemmas of Change in Soviet Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).

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lapse as a serious possibility, although not immediately.

The popular impression, then, that all Western students of the Soviet regime "got it wrong" is itself wrong. These several got it reasonably right, and others could be added, especially if Soviet émigrés were included. Andrei Amalrik's little essay of 1970, "Will the USSR Survive Until 1984?" was especially perspicacious. But the popular impression is not wrong about Sovietology in general, especially in the last two decades.

The majority of scholars clung to the illusion of a Soviet pluralist transformation for several reasons. First, some brought political and ideological baggage to their work that effectively ruled out a valid treatment of the evidence. Second, others made honest errors in their assumptions and analytic methods. In other words, they simply turned in poor term papers which deserved C's, D's, or F's, not A's or B's. The first set, political biases, involves personal choice, and although everyone has them, some biases were more distorting than others. The second set is politically benign, and it probably accounts for more of the flawed analysis. Together they go far in explaining how so many could be so wrong about so much.

Mapping the topography of political and ideological distortions, properly done, makes good but long intellectual history. Here, where brevity is a necessity if not a virtue, spelling out the more conspicuous ones must suffice.

Varieties of Bias

THE FIRST KIND, essentially an American version of the English "Whig theory of history," is the most widespread. Socialized and educated in a liberal democracy, many Sovietologists found it difficult to shed their conviction that the United States is the political norm toward which political development everywhere is tending. A liberal transformation of the Soviet system quite naturally made intuitive sense to them. They were never able to transcend their own admirable but groundless optimism.

Sovietology afflicted with this bias, of course, had the advantage of being more congenial to non-specialist opinion-makers who, in turn, could spread it more easily to policy-makers and the wider public. Because it seemed like common sense, most media elites made it an article of faith, but a core of the wider public always remained skeptical.

The second kind arose from domestic political struggle in the United States—and in some West European states—over U.S. policy in Vietnam. Many of the opponents of the war, carried by the momentum of their arguments and emotions, came to believe that U.S. power was the major threat to world peace, not Soviet power. Armed with this moral certitude, they began to find virtues in the Soviet system, or at least tendencies in its development that portended redeeming features. The old totalitarian model, which had dominated the Soviet field in the 1950s, became an anathema to them. They saw it as nothing more than a Western propaganda tool designed to whip up anti-Soviet sentiment among professors who could impart that passion to unsuspecting students passing through their classrooms.

Although this bias in Sovietology most significantly affected the political left, variants of it influenced some on the political right. Those who quietly maintained their isolationist doubts about America's global engagement to contain communism during the 1950s and 1960s, were happy with President Nixon's detente policy. Anticommunism, in their view, had gone too far.

Peripatetic Russian and East European Marxists brought the third kind of bias to the United States. The dearth of American specialists in Soviet affairs immediately after World War II was overcome in part by the availability of émigrés who were either European or Russian Social Democrats, usually of the Menshevik stripe, or highly influenced by them. They knew the Bolsheviks all

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too well, and they found American willingness to contain Stalin's Soviet Union most congenial. Many were extremely capable scholars, and without their work, the field today would be much poorer. Some of them remained convinced, nonetheless, that Marxism was basically sound as a theory of development, that Lenin was merely a Social Democrat gone astray, and that Stalin was an evil genius who abandoned Leninism and took Russia away from the path to true Social Democracy.

Unlike American ethnocentrists, the bearers of this bias believed that the Soviet Union could eventually throw off Stalinism and become a truly democratic polity with a socialist economy. As one of them put it in a university seminar over two decades ago, "Political democracy is good, but it is not enough. We must also have economic democracy." Most Americans never understood this bias, and they would have found it objectionable if they had. Socialism was hardly their idea of democracy.

These older Social Democrats did not necessarily rule out the collapse of the Soviet system, but they favored its transformation to true socialism as opposed to the Stalinist variant, and some did not put Lenin beyond redemption. Their interpretations of the early Soviet experience fostered the debate in American universities about whether Stalinism emerged organically from Leninism, or whether it was a discontinuity, a break with Leninism. The dispute is alive and well today in many classrooms, conferences, and academic journals, and these inheritors of the mantle of Menshevism continue to find evidence of political pluralism in Leninism that was blighted by Stalinism.

A fourth kind of bias comes from the right wing of the political spectrum. A few specialists believed that the Soviet system, particularly its ideology, was virtually unconstrained in its power and its capacity for duplicity and evil. Affirming faith in this revealed truth was more important to them than understanding the system's dynamic. Soviet leaders and their policies, of course, provided ample evidence almost daily to keep scholars of this persuasion busy merely recording it. They did not have to distort the facts; they merely went wrong in interpreting them. The power they attributed to the system, especially its capacity to expand, caused them to overlook the internal contradictions that would eventually help bring down the regime. They can hardly be accused of anticipating a pluralist evolution in the Soviet Union, but the implausibility of some of their analysis served to reinforce the biases of those on the left wing of the Western political spectrum. Unintentionally, they contributed to the dominance of the pluralism fallacy.

For example, Marian Leighton viewed Gorbachev's policies as a spectacular deception.[5] Alain Besançon insisted, at least in conversations, that the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe was a calculated trick to mislead the West. Not a few Soviet émigrés entertained similar suspicions during the early years of perestroika. Even some Soviet officials took that view. Colonel General Lobov, Chief of the General Staff in the first months after the August coup, flatly stated that Gorbachev's new "defensive" military doctrine was intended as a deception.[6] Lobov lends credence to Western paranoids, but both he and they overestimated the Communist Party's capacity to pull off the grand scam, avoiding the "grand failure." Erring in this direction was safer for policymaking, but it obscured the actual dynamics of Soviet politics.

All four biases inspired mistaken expectations about Soviet politics. While the first three encouraged the illusion of pluralism, the fourth failed to correct that error with its illusion of Soviet omnipotence. And none anticipated the system's collapse.

So much for ideological baggage. The other reason why Sovietologists got it wrong

[5] *The Deceptive Lure of Detente* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

[6] V.N. Lobov, interview in *Krasnaya zvezda*, October 23, 1991.

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was simply honest but erroneous analysis. This, too, came in a variety of guises, and the more egregious ones will illuminate how the pluralism fallacy was sustained so stubbornly for so long against so much contrary evidence.[7]

Misunderstanding Totalitarianism

JACOB TALMON, Hannah Arendt, and George Orwell certainly deserve much credit for developing the concept of totalitarianism, but Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski articulated it in the mid 1950s as a political science model, providing six defining characteristics, and thus identifying a unique form of authoritarianism, qualitatively different from all previous types of dictatorship. Modern technology and communications made it possible, which explains why totalitarianism only made its appearance in the twentieth century.

Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and the Soviet Union were lumped together as belonging to this new category of political systems. Friedrich and Brzezinski made it clear that they were describing an ideal type, and carefully noted that each real case only approximated the ideal. The Soviet Union came closest to the ideal, followed by Nazi Germany.

Debates over the validity of the concept are long and arcane,[8] but a couple of points must be noted. According to totalitarianism's internal logic, the dictator has to sustain a bloody domestic struggle to keep power highly centralized—*or to risk letting the system decay and eventually collapse*. Very little attention was given to the second alternative, encouraging the impression that totalitarian dictators would always act to maximize their power. When Khrushchev acted otherwise by launching his de-Stalinization policy, it caught Sovietologists by surprise. How could Khrushchev give up Stalin's use of blood purges without undercutting his power? This unexpected behavior caused many Sovietologists to doubt the utility of the model. The mainstream of the field soon dismissed it as no longer relevant, and even as misleading about the past. The concept's logic of decay was wholly forgotten.

The second point concerns uniqueness. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy and the cultural thaw of the 1950s and early 1960s also encouraged the view that the Soviet system was no longer unique, if indeed it ever had been. It was only a variant of authoritarianism in general. Yet only one of the defining characteristics, terror, had been softened by Khrushchev. All the other features of the system remained unchanged. The empirical grounds for this reassessment were therefore dubious. Moreover, Khrushchev's policies should have caused scholars to remember and think seriously about the "decay" variant of totalitarianism's dynamics, not just the "permanent purge" variant emphasized by Brzezinski.

Abandonment of the totalitarian model was the turning point that led so many Sovietologists to misunderstand the dynamics of the Soviet regime under Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev. For them the system was only a virulent form of the authoritarianism found elsewhere, such as in Franco's Spain, Pinochet's Chile, and the many military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s. If these other dictatorships could transform, then why not the Soviet Union?

Ironically, as intellectuals within Soviet-type regimes began to learn about the concept of totalitarianism, they found it a valid description of their world. The former Czech president and playwright, Vaclav Havel, has written compellingly about the system's penetration of the psyche of all citizens, and the Polish dissident, Adam Michnik, used it enthusiastically to explain

[7]For the arguments in the remainder of this essay, I draw on my own article, "Soviet Politics and After," *World Politics* (October 1992), written for a more specialized readership.

[8]Ibid., and Giovanni Sartori, "Totalitarianism, Model Mania and Learning from Error," *The Journal of Theoretical Politics*, No. 5 (1993) deals with the criticisms of the concept.

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politics in Eastern Europe. In Russia today, both liberals and conservatives often use it to characterize the Soviet regime.

Admittedly, the totalitarian model had its limitations, but no better alternative was devised. Those who dismissed it had to caricature or distort it in order to make a plausible case for ignoring it.

The Evasions of Pluralism

ALTERNATIVES to the totalitarian model were offered, including interest group theory, bureaucratic pluralism, institutional pluralism, and corporatism. With all of them the idea that the system might be decaying was further obscured, for each one gave the impression that power in the Soviet system was slowly diffusing to a plurality of groups and institutions. The proponents of the alternative models insisted that terms like "rules of the game" and "legitimacy" accurately defined a progression toward constitutionalism in the Soviet system. Thus emerged implicitly, sometimes explicitly, a promise of liberal development in Soviet politics. Perhaps the road was long, but it led from the rule of the "one" to the rule of the "many."

If this had been true, after four decades of pluralist evolution the remaining distance to liberal democracy in the Soviet Union should have been short. Other dictatorships had already finished the trip, transforming themselves into constitutional systems: Spain, Portugal, Taiwan, South Korea, Chile...the list is long. Could the Soviet Union be far behind? Obviously not, and thus the proponents of the liberal promise greeted Gorbachev's perestroika as the last mile of the trip. In the Soviet Union's vast number of educated bureaucrats, some Sovietologists saw a Soviet "middle class" that would sustain liberal democracy because it shared much with middle classes everywhere. All that was needed was a truly competitive electoral process, and Gorbachev introduced that in 1989.

Seduction by the pluralist promise—a liberal promise, insofar as it had ideological inspiration—required that one ignore the history of constitutionalism in Europe. The path was long and sometimes violent. To reach its goal, strong state institutions had to be built, reasonably uncorrupt civil services had to be created, and courts had to be independent. Before perestroika, the Soviet Union had not even *talked* about the first steps on that path. The liberal promise discouraged the paying of attention to the very realities that insured its disappointment.

The Nationality Question. The Soviet Union was a multinational state. No one denied that. Yet most scholars ignored the nationality question when considering the dynamics of the system. Was it possible for the Soviet Union as a whole to make the transformation to liberal democracy? Or was its breakup a precondition for a liberal course of development? These questions were seldom asked. Brzezinski and Conquest were early exceptions in this regard. Both saw the nationality problem as the Achilles' heel of the system, and that accounts in part for their doubts about its transformation.

By contrast, mainstream Sovietologists saw it as manageable if not benign. Professor Jerry Hough not only dismissed the nationality problem as an obstruction to liberal development but also argued that Gorbachev could use the threat of national centrifugal forces to get elite support for pushing ahead with liberal policies. Professor Timothy Colton, who was more modest about liberal development, nonetheless objected that "Soviet ethnic relations are too often discussed by foreigners in apocalyptic language, sometimes as if the Soviet multi-national state were on the verge of collapsing like a house of cards."[9] Both views proved to be remarkable misjudgments.

[9]Jerry Hough, "Consolidating Power," *Problems of Communism*, (July-August 1987), and Colton, *The Dilemmas of Reform in the Soviet Union* (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 1986).

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Very few stable liberal democracies are multinational states. Switzerland, with four nationalities, is an exceptional case. Britain still has troubles with Scots who want to separate, not to mention the problems with Northern Ireland. Belgium has difficulty with two ethnic groups, and Canada periodically verges on a breakup over French-speaking Quebec. The idea that the Soviet Union, with its record of oppression of nationalism, could undertake basic reform without splitting apart required an act of faith, a dismissal of all historical experience.

A liberal empire is an oxymoron. When liberalism spread within the British Empire—the one empire to allow it to do so—the British began to lose their colonies. To overlook this record when anticipating Soviet political dynamics under Gorbachev was to commit a remarkable error of omission. When Yeltsin became the head of the Russian Republic in 1990 and began to talk of taking it out of the Soviet Union, it was difficult to see how the Soviet Union could survive for long. By that time, the Baltic republics and Georgia and Armenia were quite far down the road to secession. Apocalpytic language was too little, not too much, used in highlighting the nationality problem in the Soviet Union.

The Economic Question. No less egregious was the tendency to overlook the political implications of the Soviet command economy. Russia long struggled with economic backwardness, and only during the last decades of the Russian Empire did it make impressive progress in growth. Modest erosion of the throne's proclivity to dictate economic development patterns began to allow markets more influence on investments and growth. The Bolshevik regime reversed this trend and imposed the most centrally controlled economy in history.

Although it took a while, the inefficiencies of central planning eventually began to strangle the Soviet economy. During and after World War II, it produced military materiel impressively but at the expense of everything else. The political implications of the command economy should have disturbed Western students who believed that a pluralist political development was afoot. The political opposition necessary for such pluralism requires that it have control over sufficient resources to compete legally and effectively. After all, the middle class groups that transformed authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere had private wealth that they could use politically. Moreover, their market economies required the creation of institutions and legal norms that made a peaceful political transition possible.

No such diffusion of wealth, and thus no creation of the concomitant institutions, was occurring in the Soviet Union. Indeed, a diffusion of wealth was occurring, but not in the form of legitimate private property. Black marketing, special privileges for party officials, selling favors from bureaucratic positions, and bribery were the institutions of this process. They do not produce legal, independent groupings, of the kind capable of imposing a constitutional order. On the contrary, they resist such development because it would spoil their system of spoils.

From the days of the Libermanism, a scheme for altering managers' incentives, and the Kosygin economic reforms in the 1960s, many Sovietologists insisted that the Soviet economy was being decentralized. By the time one set of reforms was indisputably dead, failing to cause the anticipated evolution, another set would appear to rekindle the illusion. And so it continued down through Gorbachev's rule. Persistent misreading of the Soviet economy tended to reinforce the illusion of the "liberal promise" in political development. For those who understood that markets precede liberal democracy, markets had to be emerging in Soviet-type states. For those who did not, the illusion of liberal development was even easier to maintain.

Given the concern in English and American political theory with property as a

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source of liberty, not to mention Marx's emphasis on the relationship between ownership of property and politics, this failure to see that the Soviet command economy thwarted the liberal promise is puzzling. Rights over control of resources were at the root of the agreement in the Magna Carta. James Harrington, watching the decline of feudalism in England, saw that the costs of standing armies would induce kings to take more and more nobles' land under their own control, thus upsetting the feudal political balance, a trend that would contain the danger of tyranny. Centralizing monarchs in England and France vindicated Harrington's analysis. Oliver Cromwell and General Ireton, at the Putney debates with the "Levellers" and the "Diggers," insisted that private property was a right based on natural law. It could not be violated to satisfy the economic egalitarianism of these factions in the Roundhead Army. John Locke and Adam Smith, albeit from different starting points, found political virtue in the individual's right to property. More recently, Charles Lindblom, in *Markets and Politics*, has emphasized that all contemporary liberal democracies have market economies while none has a predominantly state-controlled economy.

English political philosophers and their followers in Colonial America were not concerned with creating democracy. We sometimes forget this. They addressed a different task: how to prevent tyranny. How to constrain man's inexorable propensity for greed and evil troubled Madison and the American founding fathers, just as it had Locke. Democracy was perhaps a logical consequence of preventing tyranny, but the early liberal theorists did not have democracy as a goal. They focused on individual rights against the state. Liberty was guaranteed by property, and if the state could violate the right of property, there would soon be no liberty. Stalin understood this clearly when he collectivized the peasantry.

Neglecting the relationship between markets and liberal democracy, as well as the relationship between state ownership of property and tyranny, made it much easier to "get it wrong" about Soviet political dynamics.

The Military Question. Not only Sovietologists but also Russian historians have overlooked the military factor in Russian and Soviet political development. While examining every scrap of evidence about revolutionaries in nineteenth-century Russia, historians have virtually ignored the role of the military, although it enjoyed the largest budget of any department of the imperial government throughout the century. More attention has been paid to the Soviet military, but through a prism of Western preconceptions.

The old Russian regime always made the acquisition of military power the guiding rationale for economic, social, and other policies. The Bolsheviks did more than reinforce this tradition; they gave it a pseudo-scientific basis in Marxism. One of the earliest manuscripts by Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (1846), emphasized that private ownership of the means of production caused the "alienation" of man from man and thereby created the objective basis for class struggle and warfare. The source of war, therefore, is private property. True peace would come only with the worldwide victory of the working class because it would abolish the source of war, private ownership of the means of production.

This theory made all capitalist states objectively a military "threat" to the socialist camp, giving the Soviet military both a very large challenge and a vital function. Ritualized in military textbooks, it provided a "scientific" rationale for an unending Soviet military buildup. Theory led to practice, and creating military power became the highest priority in Soviet policy from the late 1920s right down to Gorbachev's rule.

The appearance of nuclear weapons temporarily caused ideological confusion in the 1950s. If war with the capitalist camp was inevitable, nuclear war had to be

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winnable. Western strategists insisted that it was not. That meant the ultimate victory of socialism through warfare was in doubt. By the mid 1960s, however, the confusion was overcome. In the new formula, nuclear weapons were said to be terrible, threatening massive loss of human life, but if the capitalist camp resorted to their use, socialism would inevitably prevail. Many specialists on Soviet military affairs, most notably Raymond Garthoff, insisted that Soviet leaders did not really mean what they were saying. Others simply ignored Soviet views on the subject. During the years of perestroika, much new evidence appeared to indicate that the Soviet leaders did indeed believe what they said.[10]

Astoundingly, some scholars found the Soviet military a source of pluralist political development. Insisting that the party and the military were at odds over ideology and military professionalism, Roman Kolkowicz argued in the 1960s that the Soviet military was gaining a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the Party, and this contributed to the general trend toward institutional pluralism.[11] Variants of this thesis, especially Party-military tensions, became a tenet of faith among most Sovietologists. If it were so, how do they explain that the senior military proved among the strongest defenders of the ideology during perestroika? The answer is uncomfortable for them. Marxism-Leninism, based on class struggle, revolution, and war as the motors of history, is a militarized ideology. The Soviet economy was the archetype war mobilization economy even in peace. Soviet manpower policy, social policy, and education policy all logically favored military priorities.

Little of this military character of the Soviet regime attracted attention among scholars. Economists generally ignored the military industrial sector or refused to admit its enormous size.[12] Political scientists wished away the ideological basis for Soviet military power, often explaining it as a reaction to the threatening character of U.S. military power. Taking it into account would have dashed expectations of creeping pluralism.

The Detente Fallacy. Understanding the military question also could have dispelled misperceptions of the connection between Soviet foreign and domestic policy. Virtually all students of the Soviet Union have insisted that relaxation of East-West tensions would have a positive effect on Soviet domestic political development. Most of the authors in Brzezinski's 1969 volume on the future of the Soviet Union argued that a climate of detente would hurry change, be it transformation or degeneration, while East-West tensions would slow it. President Nixon and Henry Kissinger based U.S. strategy on this assumption in the early 1970s. Convinced of its validity, they did not hesitate to make concessions to Brezhnev in arms control and economic assistance. The Soviet regime responded by more repression at home and more expansion abroad.[13]

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[10]V.V. Zagladin, in an interview in *Izvestiia*, June 27, 1988, admitted that Soviet leaders assumed that victory in nuclear war was possible. A.I. Bulanov and I.A. Krylova, "The Relationship of Politics and Nuclear War," *Voprosy filosofii* (No. 5, 1988), pp. 110-24, reveal how deeply seated the "victory in nuclear war" assumption really was.

[11]Roman Kolkowicz, *The Communist Party and the Soviet Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

[12]See, for example, Franklyn D. Holzman, "Politics and Guess Work: CIA and DIA Estimates of Soviet Military Spending," *International Security* (Fall, 1989). All the evidence pouring out of Russia that the CIA woefully underestimated the extent of the military sector had not altered Holzman's opinion as late as the fall of 1992, when he spoke at Yale University.

[13]Consider the irony in Kissinger's reasoning that detente and SALT I were necessitated by the decline of U.S. power. If that had been an accurate assessment of U.S. power, giving the Soviet Union a large edge in the treaty would have been remarkably imprudent! In fact it was not all that risky precisely because U.S. power was not in decline.

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On what grounds does the theory of detente's liberalizing effect rest? Its proponents have said that it would impose entangling foreign dependencies on the Soviet Union, strengthen the doves in the Politburo and the liberals in the bureaucracy, and moderate the system by exposing it to democratic ideas, consumer desires, and intellectual freedom. At first glance, these propositions appeal to common sense, but on historical reflection they do not. The record since the time of Peter the Great supports a contrary theory of what prompts liberal reform in Russia.

Peter turned to the West to improve his military power when he realized that he could not defeat the Swedes and other more advanced neighbors. He forced Western influences onto Russia, but they did not bring liberal political development. They strengthened autocracy. Russia never suffered a sustained military defeat—although it lost some campaigns—throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Only after Russia lost the Crimean War in the 1850s was Alexander II able to overcome conservative resistance among the nobility to launch dramatic liberal reforms—emancipation of the peasants, legal and education reforms, local government reform, and most important, military reform. All other reforms were necessary in order to deal with military modernization. Russian defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1904 not only prompted a revolution but also the czar's reluctant signature on the October Manifesto, creating the elective state Duma demanded by liberal politicians. Exhaustion in World War I brought the end of the empire, a new provisional government committed to democracy, and the promise of a constituent assembly to provide legitimacy for democracy in Russia. Only military disasters gave the liberals leadership opportunities during the two centuries of the Russian Empire, never detente with the West.

The Bolsheviks closed the door on liberalism for seven decades. Initial defeats in World War II caused Stalin to relax communist orthodoxy, but victory over Germany in 1945 allowed him to reassert it. During the next four decades, the Soviet Union carried through the largest peacetime military buildup in history, achieved hegemony over Eastern Europe, and won client states widely in the Third World. Nixon's detente strategy encouraged the Politburo to believe that the "correlation of forces" between socialism and capitalism was shifting steadily in favor of socialism.

President Carter's reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, including the most severe sanctions any other U.S. president ever took against the Soviet Union, was followed by President Reagan's defense buildup. Economic cooperation ceased; credits dried up; technology was denied; the Afghan resistance received massive support.

By the mid 1980s, Soviet leaders realized they were facing a major defeat, not only in Afghanistan but also in the qualitative arms race and in Western public opinion. Given their domestic realities—a stagnant economy and a corrupt party bureaucracy—they reacted in the traditional Russian way: selective liberal reform. Detente as a strategy for inducing liberal change clearly rested on a fallacious view of the historical record. If history offered a clue about how liberal development might come to the Soviet Union, it was that political and military defeats abroad were likely to facilitate it.

Is there nothing to the theory that peaceful interaction with the West brings liberal change in Russia? The fallacy lies not in the impact of interaction but in the belief that it alone would transform the system, and that Western ideas and practices could not be taken selectively. Russians have not been the childlike people portrayed by proponents of the detente fallacy. They learned about the West during times of tension as well as detente. Their leaders knew the dangers of liberal ideas and consumer habits, and succeeded for long periods in limiting

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their ill effects while taking things that reinforced their dictatorship. When they were defeated unambiguously, however, their defense mechanisms broke down. It was that breakdown that gave proponents of liberal reform their hour upon the stage, not extended periods of detente in East-West relations.

THE SUBJECTS OF this unkindly critique can rightly assert that hindsight is easier than foresight. True, but that does not change the record. At the very heart of "getting it wrong" about Soviet politics was the conviction that a pluralist political development characterized the regime's dynamics. Ideological baggage and analytic errors alike created it, sustained it against contrary evidence, and inoculated it against contrary analysis.

Have the standards of this critique been too severe? I believe not. They demand no great precision in anticipating particular events or policy choices. To meet them in "getting it right," one did not have to predict that the Soviet Union would collapse in 1991 or that Gorbachev would make the policy choices he did. They do require that one's theory of Soviet politics (or interpretation of Russian history) made such events plausible and unsurprising. Much Sovietology made them implausible and shocking. The best evidence for the fairness of these standards is that a few scholars met them, not just in the terminal phase of perestroika but more than two decades earlier. □

***In the Summer Issue of* The National Interest:**

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Laurence Martin on *The Peacekeeping Industry*

Gertrude Himmelfarb on *Nationalism and Religion*

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Sovietology:
Notes for a Post-Mortem

Peter Rutland

AFTER MIKHAIL Gorbachev's ascension to power, considerable effort went into predicting the Soviet future. This concern spread from the op-ed pages and congressional hearings to infect the furthest corners of the discipline of Sovietology. Pundits, politicians, and undergraduates who could not locate the Volga river on a map would happily write essays or deliver speeches about Gorbachev's real intentions. Professional conferences were increasingly devoted to round table discussions of Gorbachev's next move, rather than to the presentation of research findings.[1]

Despite all this effort, most commentators got it totally wrong. Social scientists in general, of course, have a poor record when it comes to predicting political developments, from the wave of democratization in the 1980s and the economic boom in China to the civil war in Yugoslavia.

One can only conclude that social scientists should not be enticed into futurology. It may be that prediction can work if one is dealing with large numbers of human events, as in Durkheim's classic study of suicide. But there was only one Soviet Union, and the collective suicide of its ruling elite has few historical parallels. Perhaps social scientists should quietly steal away and retrain as historians of the present.

One of the principal arguments of historians that social scientists will have to accept concerns the role of accident in history. In the Soviet context, acknowledging this role is usually a prelude to a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Mikhail Gorbachev: his courage in launching perestroika, his foolishness in failing to see that democratization would undermine the very institutions which sustained him in power.

This concentration on interpreting and reinterpreting Gorbachev's actions has been overdone, on occasion to the point of absurdity—as, for example, in Gail Sheehy's biography, *The Man who Changed the World*, where the transformation of the USSR seems to hinge on Gorbachev's reaction to male menopause.[2] This is not to deny Gorbachev his place in history. But Gorbachev was not a Lincoln or an Ataturk, a Lenin or a Hitler; he was merely an above-average product of the *nomenklatura* system. It is hard to find anybody fluent in Russian who has heard Gorbachev speak and come away in awe of his intellectual abilities. And despite all the talk of factionalism within the Politburo

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[1]The American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies did not even bother to make papers available at its annual meetings during this period. In contrast, the American Historical Association bans scholars from presenting at their meeting for two years if they fail to submit a promised paper in advance.

[2]New York: Perennial Library, 1990.

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there is little evidence that he faced serious opposition in the upper reaches of the party until 1988-1989—by which time the die was cast.

There are at least two other serious candidates for the role of the critical accident in the demise of the USSR, though they have been neglected because of the obsession with Gorbachev. The Afghan war was never taken very seriously by Sovietologists, who dismissed the notion that it was a Soviet Vietnam. Instead, it was portrayed as an embarrassing vestige of the Brezhnev era, a minor impediment to perestroika. Thus Ernest Gellner, arguing that the USSR was not likely to collapse in the near future, mentions by way of contrast that the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires only fell after defeat in foreign wars. But he does so without referring to the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan.[3] Afghanistan, though, was a humbling reversal for the Soviet Army, and raised serious doubts in the minds of the military about the relevance of "socialist internationalism" and the competence of the established political elite. No surprise, then, that when in 1991 the Party needed the army, it deserted them. (Perhaps the main contribution Ronald Reagan made to the fall of communism was sending Stinger missiles to the *mujaheddin*).

Second, there is Chernobyl—literally and figuratively, an accident of the first magnitude. It is amazing how many accounts of "the Gorbachev era" deal with Chernobyl in a sentence or two. Yet Chernobyl played a crucial role in transforming glasnost from a sterile political campaign into a genuine movement for change. The pluralist school of Sovietologists was in the habit of proudly noting that under Brezhnev the environment was one of the few topics of legitimate public debate (albeit within carefully defined limits). However, Chernobyl changed the character of that debate, from a tolerated discourse among specialists to a massive outpouring of public concern by ordinary citizens worried about the physical survival of themselves and their children.

The Soviet system was held together by fear of the state's capacity to punish dissent. This fear was inherited from the Stalinist past, and the KGB had to do very little to keep it in place. (Surveys of Jewish émigrés—people one would have expected to get more than their share of attention—revealed that only 2 percent had any personal contact with the KGB). After Chernobyl, however, fear of ecological catastrophe displaced the lingering fear of the KGB.

This popular "radiaphobia" was not without foundation. In subsequent years, for example, high radiation meat was spread around the USSR, in order to limit dosage accumulation in Ukraine and Belarus. Thanks to glasnost, local newspapers in Siberia warned readers when "Chernobyl beef" was due to arrive. Could one seriously expect the subjects of such a state to regard it as legitimate? Chernobyl stimulated protest movements around nuclear plants and chemical factories in the Baltic and Armenia, and frightened the Russian intelligentsia into challenging the bureaucratic state responsible for the disaster and the way its consequences were mishandled.

So accidents matter. But how to put these contingencies into some sort of intelligible context? What approaches are available to social scientists who do not want merely to catalogue the accidents of history? To be more specific, what approaches permitted some students of the Soviet Union to foresee, not particular accidents, but the vulnerability of the regime to accident?

Some Got It Right

GIVEN OUR skepticism as to the possibility of predicting historical events, the real issue is not who provided the answers as to the USSR's longevity, but: Who was asking the right questions?

[3]Ernest Gellner, "Nationalism in the Vacuum," in Alexander Motyl's *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

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Across the Atlantic, French authors were more prone to see the fragility of the Soviet system. For example, Emmanuel Todd (not himself a Russian specialist) wrote a popular book in 1976 (*La Chute Final*) underlining the instability of the Soviet system by pointing to the precariousness of its internal and external empire and its economic and democratic stagnation.[4]

In the United States, however, one commentator and one volume of essays may be singled out as showing extraordinary prescience about the Soviet political system. Zbigniew Brzezinski never wavered from his 1962 analysis of ideology and power as the key categories of Soviet politics, which led him to conclude that the system was incapable of incremental reform.[5] Writing in 1976, he saw breakdown as much more likely than reform, and noted that "The national question creates a major block to gradual evolution."[6] In January 1988 Brzezinski was suggesting that the year could witness another "Spring of Nations," as in 1848.[7]

In his magisterial *The Grand Failure* (1989), Brzezinski listed the options as reform, turmoil, stagnation, coup, and fragmentation—and considered turmoil the most likely. He rejected the conventional view that the Politburo was split between advocates and enemies of reform. The main obstacle to change was the intrinsically unreformable nature of the system, and not some sort of reactionary opposition to Gorbachev inside the Communist Party. "Unintentionally, Gorbachev's policies are contributing to the buildup of a potentially revolutionary situation," he maintained, "reducing the level of political fear, even as they are raising the level of social frustration.... Such a combination is inherently explosive." For thirty years Brzezinski swam against the current of the Sovietological mainstream, which turned away from the totalitarian model, but he was vindicated by events.

Pride of place for a precognition of the events of 1989-91, however, must be shared by a volume edited by Alexander Shtromas, a Lithuanian émigré, and Morton Kaplan in 1987.[8] The book was a product of a conference in Geneva of the World Professors' Peace Academy, an organization funded by the Reverend Myung Sun Moon's Unification Church. It is hard to believe that the Moonies got it right when the CIA, Brookings, RAND, Harvard, Columbia and the rest got it wrong, but I would urge skeptics to read the book. (It should be added that the authors themselves were not Moonies.)

In his contribution, for example, Richard Burks concluded that "The chances for system breakdown in the next 5-10 years are probably better than even," since "All these problems have to be dealt with by a government that is no longer working as it was designed to do." This erosion of authority was a result of the veto power accumulated by bureaucrats and the succession struggles

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[4]Paris: Robert Lafont, 1990 [1976].

[5]Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Soviet System: Transformation or Degeneration?", *Problems of Communism* (January 1966); and *Ideology and Power in Soviet Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1962). For a debate on his ideas, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, ed., *Dilemmas of Change in Soviet Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). Brzezinski did, however, get it wrong in his first book, *The Permanent Purge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), in which he argued that the USSR could not survive without repeated purges.

[6]Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Soviet Politics," in Paul Cocks *et al.*, eds., *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[7]Cited in Milovan Djilas, "New Utopias for Old," in George Urban, ed., *Can the Soviet System Survive Reform?* (New York: Pinter, 1989). Djilas disagreed.

[8]Alexander Shtromas and Morton Kaplan, eds., *The Soviet Union and the Challenge of the Future* (New York: Paragon House, 1988). The manuscript was completed in April 1987.

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which turned the general secretary into a "walking corpse." Burks warned of "The danger of a political landslide [where] total control has ended by producing total dissent."

Similarly, Shtromas argued that "The new technocratic elite, with Gorbachev at its helm, would certainly not hesitate to introduce the long overdue radical system reforms that, being incompatible with totalitarian communist, would surely lead to its dismantlement." He anticipated a split in the elite and the emergence of a "second pivot" as a rival to the Communist Party. Shtromas did not predict that an elected Congress would emerge in such a role (his favored candidate was the military), but the concept of a "second pivot" was a useful insight into the mechanism of perestroika's demise—before the event. Shtromas also correctly perceived that the Soviet ideological state had fatally weakened the mobilizing power of Russian nationalism.

The contribution to the volume by A.P. Fedoseyev, a radio engineer, was the most perspicacious of all. Chaos loomed, he maintained, because of the "gradual collapse of state planning," while "not one decree of the Politburo is now being fulfilled." A popular revolution was unlikely, but some sort of coup could be expected—by the military or KGB, or of the "palace" variety.

How is one to explain the relative success of these authors? Shtromas and Fedoseyev drew upon their experience inside the system, while Burks was an East Europeanist who saw the parallels with 1956, 1968, and 1980. All three had one thing in common: they were not Sovietologists.

Sovietology: What Went Wrong?

THERE IS ALREADY a conventional wisdom about where Sovietology went wrong, built around the following explanations:

- Academic objectivity was obscured by political bias, either of the left (anti-anticommunism), or the right ("the evil empire").
- Soviet area studies was methodologically feeble because of its isolation from the core social science disciplines.[9]
- Specialists lacked a rigorous grounding in the languages and histories of the region—particularly of the non-Russian peoples of the USSR.
- Those who tried to conduct research inside the USSR faced insuperable hurdles: unreliable or non-existent data, problems of access, deliberate misinformation by Soviet officials and academics, etc.
- Professional, personal and political rivalry left most émigré scholars "out in the cold," and prevented Sovietology from benefiting from their insights.
- The seduction of leading academics into the role of media pundits and soothsayers left paltry incentives for careful empirical research and the close supervision of doctoral dissertations.
- Excessive dependence on government funding allowed the Pentagon/CIA to set the academic agenda.

Except perhaps for the last, all of these points contain a degree of truth.

Some of the fiercest debate is brewing over the question of political bias. Each side accuses the other of manipulating Soviet studies to serve its domestic political agenda. The left accuses the right of ethnocentrism, of projecting liberal values onto a society that was not ready for them. Thus Frederic Fleron and Erik Hoffman offer the following astonishing argument:

> We [Sovietologists] are products of an Anglo-American political culture. As a result, we tend to define democracy in procedural rather than substantive terms. Many of us have little appreciation for the intellectual and historical traditions from which the Bolsheviks emerged—a revolutionary tradition that

[9]As argued by Frederick J. Fleron Jr. and Erik P. Hoffman, "Sovietology and Perestroika: Methodology and Lessons from the Past," Harriman Institute Forum (September 1991).

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emphasized economic freedoms over political freedoms....What good was freedom of speech to people who were hungry?[10]

On the other side it is argued that many liberal Sovietologists were driven by their distaste for the Cold War and fear of the Bomb to portray the USSR in as favorable a light as possible, to prove that they were "just like us."

In fact, blatant left-wing partisanship was much less of a problem in the study of Soviet politics than it was in Soviet history. Writers such as Seweryn Bialer and Jerry Hough did not exaggerate the stability of the Soviet state because of closet sympathies for the Brezhnev regime, or out of a desire to demean the achievements of the American political system. It is true that most Sovietologists seemed to hold liberal views, but this is true of most academics. And there were fewer Marxists studying the USSR than there were studying, say, Latin America or Western Europe.

In fact, the problem may have been too little political bias rather than too much, in the sense that liberal scholars bent over backwards to disguise their political opinions and analyze the USSR in a "non-judgmental" fashion. This distracted them from the glaring inefficiencies of the Soviet system—flaws which Western Marxists and conservatives alike found it much easier to recognize.[11]

It is true that Sovietologists tended to disparage the potential contribution of émigré scholars. However, while having a profound understanding of the internal contradictions of the Soviet system, émigrés and dissidents did not do much better than Sovietologists at foreseeing its demise.[12] Three decades ago, the dissident historian Andrei Amalrik boldly stated "I have no doubt that this great Eastern Slav empire, created by Germans, Byzantines and Mongols, has entered the last decades of its existence."[13] But Amalrik thought the USSR would inevitably be drawn into a war with China, which would serve as the *deus ex machina*. Twenty years later, Vladimir Bukovsky was arguing that the system was in terminal crisis, and that reforms would eventually fail, though they could prolong the life of the system in the short term.[14] Bukovsky did not try to estimate how long the death throes would last, nor precisely how the system would come to an end.

It was fine and noble to condemn the Soviet empire by word and by deed as a violation of human nature. But this does not help us understand why it collapsed in 1991, rather than in 1981 or 1971 (not to mention in 1941 or 1953).

It is not convincing to attribute Sovietology's ills to a defective methodology. There is no evidence that the adoption of "hard" methodologies, such as content analysis of speeches or statistical analysis of career data, brought greater understanding of the Soviet political system than did "softer" methodologies. In fact, one can plausibly argue quite the opposite. Most of the best-funded research projects were indeed those that adopted quantitative techniques, such as the Soviet Interview Project (SIP), a survey of 4,500 émigrés which focused on the routines of daily life in the USSR. It wasn't so much that SIP got anything very wrong, it was just that when it finished there seemed to be little

[10]Fleron and Hoffman, "Sovietology and Perestroika," p. 6.

[11]For a typical Marxist analysis, see Ernest Mandel, *Beyond Perestroika* (New York: Verso 1989).

[12]Vladimir Krasnov, "Images of the Soviet Future: The Émigré and Samizdat Debate" in Shtromas and Kaplan, pp. 357-89.

[13]Andrei Amalrik, *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 57.

[14]Vladimir Bukovsky, "The Political Condition of the Soviet Union," in Henry S. Rowen and Charles Wolf, eds., *The Future of the Soviet Empire* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), and "The Quiet Exit from Communism," in Urban, *Can the Soviet System Survive Reform?*, p. 261.

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to show for the $8 million the project reportedly cost.[15]

Another point against the disciplinary flabbiness argument is that when comparativists from other fields were brought in to discuss Soviet affairs, they tended to accept, rather than challenge or reject, the prevailing assumptions of Sovietology. Thus, only one of the ethnicity specialists assembled by Alexander Motyl in 1990 raised the break-up of the USSR as a serious possibility.[16] The others all saw the incentives for the elites of the republics as lying within the existing state structure. For example, David Laitin *et al.* concluded that "Language claims by nationality groups are not the spark that is igniting the ethnic time bomb; rather, the political efforts to make these claims, if managed with good political sense, will more likely defuse the time bomb."[17]

Sausages and Doctorates

THIS IS NOT to say that there were not genuine problems with the methodology of Soviet studies. Some of these problems are vividly evident in doctoral dissertations.

The Ph.D. is typically the most serious research project an academic will undertake in his or her entire career. (Indeed, in many cases it is the only such project.) Thus Ph.D.s should provide the most reliable guide to the prevailing intellectual framework and the quality of the basic research in the field. It was with this in mind that I obtained a small grant in 1988 to read all eighty-seven dissertations written between 1976 and 1987 on Soviet domestic politics.[18] While several of the theses made for excellent reading, the overall effect was to remind one of Bismarck's comment that there are certain things, such as sausages and legislation, whose creation should not be studied too closely.

The sample amounted to a mere 4 percent of the total number of comparative politics theses written during the decade. Graduate student interest in the USSR slumped in the 1970s, and only slowly started to recover in the 1980s—thanks in part to large injections of taxpayers' money. Five universities produced an average of six theses each on Soviet domestic politics during the decade, while a quarter of the theses were written in universities that produced only one or two over the period. This implies that most students were working in relative isolation, despite the concentration of resources in research centers.

Incredibly, only seventeen of the eighty-seven thesis-writers had actually studied in the USSR—this at a time when organizations such as IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) were sending dozens of scholars to Russia each year (presumably all historians and literature specialists). Thus the charge that Sovietologists were ill-prepared as area specialists has some justification. One-quarter of the theses relied exclusively on English-language sources, and only six

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[15]See James R. Millar, ed., *Politics, Work and Daily Life in the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[16]S.N. Eisenstadt, "Center-periphery relations," in Motyl's *Thinking Theoretically About Soviet Nationalities*.

[17]For the record, I would like to admit that the first article I ever published took a cravenly functionalist approach to the dynamics of national identity in the USSR, and has been proven fundamentally incorrect. See Peter Rutland, "The Nationality Problem and the Soviet state," in Neil Harding, ed., *The State in Socialist Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

[18]The study was funded by the LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin. It was published as "Sovietology: From Stagnation to Perestroika? A Decade of Doctoral Research in Soviet Politics" (Kennan Institute, occasional paper no. 241, October 1990). I undertook the study because as an English exile I was curious to find out which aspects of Soviet affairs were being studied in the United Sates.

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showed proficiency in non-Russian languages. Those who did visit the USSR typically relied upon library work and interviews with academics. Only a handful were able to conduct anything resembling fieldwork (such as interviewing officials).

The present author knows from personal experience how difficult it was to do serious research in Brezhnevite Russia. I went to the Plekhanov Economics Institute in 1982 to study labor relations. My visit began with my "scientific supervisor" handing me a 10-page reading list on "socialist competition," the first four pages consisting of works by Marx, Lenin and Brezhnev. He told me to come back when I had read them all. Another lecturer who happened to be present took pity on me, and explained in the corridor that socialist competition was "bullshit." He gave me the names of some journalists and ministry officials to talk to (but was too scared to invite me to his home). In the end I learned something about industrial management—but never did see the inside of a Soviet factory.

As they say in California—though Feuerbach said it first—you are what you eat. Given the quality of the primary material feeding in to the base of the Sovietological discipline, it is hardly surprising that much of its high theorizing turned out to be nonsense on stilts. As far as subject matter was concerned, dissertation topics seem to have been selected on the basis of the availability of sources. A great deal of effort went into poring over the brief published biographies of Central Committee members, and into content analysis of newspaper articles. In the late 1970s several theses were generated by the CIA-funded Soviet Elite Perceptions project at Ohio State University, which involved an exhaustive content analysis of Politburo speeches. (No less than five distinct factions were identified among the eleven full Politburo members!) Few authors dallied over the question of how much interpretative weight such source material could bear. (In what sense, for example, did Politburo members express their own views in their formal speeches?) The simple fact was that the texts printed in *Pravda* were all that analysts had to go on. Thus much of the research was akin to looking for your keys under the street light because you can't see the sidewalk back where you dropped them.

Apart from all this scrutiny of Politburo speeches and the career background of Central Committee members, little attention was devoted to the core institutions of political power in the USSR: the Communist Party and government ministries. Moreover, although there were four theses on women, two on students, and several on professional groups such as journalists, no doctoral research was conducted on the basic groups which made up Soviet society—the workers, peasants and intelligentsia.

Ten of the theses addressed nationalism, and most of these have stood the test of time fairly well. Ukraine and Uzbekistan were well covered, but there was nothing on the Baltic, the Caucasus, Belarus, or Moldova, and very little on the Russian provinces.

The most common framework adopted for organizing the material was a straightforward historical narrative. ("Thank God for the calendar"). Few of the theses adopted an explicit model, such as pluralism or corporatism.[19] The most common approach was a case study of a policy decision, with the influence of Brzezinski and Huntington's 1964 textbook still visible.[20]

In view of the paucity of empirical material, many authors retreated into the realm of theory. Given the difficulty in fitting Western concepts to Soviet reality, some

[19]The most frequently cited works in the obligatory introductory literature review were Jerry Hough, *The Soviet Prefects* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); and George W. Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

[20]Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA/USSR* (New York: Viking Press, 1965).

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sought to fill the vacuum by adopting Soviet theoretical categories. One in four of the theses started off with a discussion of the thoughts of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on the subject in question (be it nationalism, the environment, military policy, industrial management, or whatever). Rather than being about the position of women in Soviet society, theses would be written about Soviet theories on the position of women in Soviet society. It was not that these writers were convinced Marxists. It was simply assumed that Marxism-Leninism shaped Soviet reality, so that was the logical place to begin. Thus much of the Sovietological community had "gone native" (at a distance) by accepting Soviet categories at face value, and entire books were devoted to such subjects as "the scientific-technological revolution" and "developed socialism."[21]

Group Think

CRITICISMS OF Sovietology for political bias, a tendency to ignore émigrés and a lack of scholarly rigor have some validity. However, even taken together they still do not get to the root of the problem, which I see as the emergence of a "disciplinary groupthink" which stifles creative thinking and controversial ideas. From this perspective, Sovietology is not an aberrant case, but is symptomatic of a general crisis besetting the social sciences. Unfortunately, there is no agreed framework for explanation in the social sciences. Philosopher of science George Von Wright usefully summarizes two distinct and asymmetrical modes of explanation: *prediction* (causal analysis) and *retrodiction* (causal explanation).[22] Causal analysis starts with a *given system*, and seeks to find what conditions were sufficient to make a particular outcome *necessary*. The analysis starts at the beginning, with a first cause, and moves forward via a decision tree, that sketches in alternative branches—some of which did not lead to the final outcome. Causal explanation, on the other hand, works back from a *given outcome*, trying to understand how this outcome was *possible* by identifying necessary conditions. Retrodictive reasoning dominates in fields such as cosmology, geology and evolution, while prediction is more common in the natural and social sciences. Retrodiction can also be used for prediction, by analyzing what *cannot* occur because necessary conditions are absent.

There are some lessons here for Sovietology. Now that the possibility of Soviet collapse has been realized, that can be taken as the starting point for analysis and Sovietology is no longer tied to the predictive mode of reasoning that was dominant prior to 1991. We do not have to start from the assumption that there is such a thing as the Soviet system, whose functional logic it is our task to explain. The main mistake of writers of both left and right was to look at the USSR in functionalist terms, as a system (mechanical, biological or cybernetic—choose your metaphor). Such an approach encourages closed thinking, and stems from the Hegelian assumption that "what is real is rational"—that is, each social institution that exists must be playing a role in maintaining the functioning whole. (The only escape which Sovietology allowed itself from its implicit functionalism was the volition of the general secretary at the apex of the political system.)

Sovietologists who accepted the description of the Soviet Union as a functioning, coherent "system" had to address two questions: How well did the system work? What were the prospects for systemic reform? The answer to the second question depended, in

[21]See, for example, Terry L. Thompson, *Soviet Ideology from Khrushchev to Gorbachev: Developed Socialism under Brezhnev* (Denver: Westview Press, 1988), and Donald R. Kelley, *The Politics of Developed Socialism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986).

[22]George H. Von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), esp. pp. 55-59.

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large part, on one's answer to the first.

Two general answers were given to the question of how the Soviet system worked: well, and badly. Optimists—mostly political liberals—thought the system was held together by more or less the same mixture of habit, consent, and coercion that applies in most developed countries. The system had flaws, but those flaws were amenable to reform and would diminish over time. On the other hand, most conservatives saw the USSR as a totalitarian regime in a class of its own, fundamentally illegitimate and irrational, and only held together by force. History has clearly vindicated the latter. Once the regime showed itself unable or unwilling to use force (in Armenia, in the Baltic, and against the coalminers), opposition and disobedience multiplied uncontrollably.

The liberal consensus on how the system worked revolved around the themes of stability, convergence, pluralism, and leadership. Back in the 1960s, Samuel P. Huntington argued that Leninism, for all its flaws, represented an alternative path to modernity, with the Communist Party an institution capable of aggregating social interests.[23] Bialer picked up the theme, making the concept of *stability* the centerpiece of his analysis. As of 1986, Bialer maintained, the USSR was facing "a crisis of effectiveness" but not "a crisis of survival." "The economy is not going bankrupt," he asserted, and "The Soviet state is certainly in no immediate danger of disintegration."[24] The book barely addresses the national question, commenting that "There is no evidence that it will become the focus of social instability." Bialer's respect for the system's permanence led him to conclude in 1983 that "I do not believe that even such a threat as the loss of the East European empire might spark an attempt by the military to take over the reins of government [because] the Soviet leadership itself will command the armed forces to crush such a danger."[25] Bialer himself did not, however, believe that liberal reforms would succeed, since the political forces arrayed against them were too powerful. But his arguments as to the USSR's stability were eagerly accepted by those credulous of perestroika.

What was the foundation of this system stability, given the absence of mass terror? Bialer and others argued that the regime had made the transition from totalitarianism to one based on popular legitimacy. Khrushchev and Brezhnev forged a "social contract," under which the people were guaranteed a basic standard of living in return for their political quiescence.[26] According to this analysis the only people capable of challenging the status quo were the industrial workers—which may have reflected a vestige of Marxist thinking. The coal miners' strikes of 1989, while being an important catalyst in the regime's collapse, disproved this interpretation on two counts. First there was no sign of any social contract having existed, as the workers' demands had been ignored for years. (Their soap ration had not been changed since 1923!)[27] Second, they showed themselves incapable of creating

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[23] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); also see, Huntington and Brzezinski, *Political Power*.

[24] Seweryn Bialer, *The Soviet Paradox*, (New York: Knopf, 1986), pp. 32, 169.

[25] Seweryn Bialer "The Political System", in Robert F. Byrnes, ed., *After Brezhnev* (New York: Pinter 1983), p. 37.

[26] See Seweryn Bialer "Gorbachev's move," and Peter Hauslohner, "Gorbachev's social contract," in Ferenc Feher and Andrew Arato, eds., *Gorbachev: The Debate* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1989); also George W. Breslauer, "On the Adaptability of Soviet Welfare-State Authoritarianism," in Karl W. Ryavec, ed., *Soviet Society and the Communist Party* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978).

[27] See Peter Rutland, "Labor Movements and Unrest 1989-90," *Soviet Economy* (Winter 1990).

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an effective trade union, let alone mounting a revolution.

The social contract aside, most scholars believed that the industrialization unleashed by Stalin would eventually produce a society comparable to those of the developed West. The logic of modernization was supposedly reinforced by forces of socio-economic competition on a global scale.[28] Jerry Hough was the most sophisticated and prolific exponent of these views.[29] Hough also urged that the transition to a Western-type society would accelerate, once leaders who matured after the death of Stalin rose to power. Hough was right in stressing the importance of the arrival of the first post-Stalin generation (with Gorbachev at their head), but wrong in believing that the new generation would be able to salvage the system.

Although most Sovietologists balked at describing the Soviet system as pluralist, few challenged the idea that interest groups were actively lobbying behind the facade of the one-party state.[30] For liberals, politics in the USSR, as elsewhere, was of the "who gets what when and how" variety. As perestroika gathered pace it became common to argue that elements of a civil society were emerging from below, in the form of a myriad of informal groups, and that this would guarantee the irreversibility of Gorbachev's reforms.[31]

These ideas were all part of an understanding that there was a social system in the USSR with structures and functions comparable to those in the West. Evidence of social change, however, could not alter the basic fact that the political system had been constructed along totalitarian lines, and its institutions could not be retooled to serve pluralist goals. It was particularly misleading to suggest that a civil society was present in the USSR. The problem was that writers got their concept of civil society from Hegel (via our old friend Karl Marx). Hegel believed civil society emerged in dialectic opposition to the state, whereas the Scottish Enlightenment authors who originated the concept saw the state as *subordinate* to civil society. The idea that civil society could grow up under a tyranny which denied private property and the rule of law would have struck Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson as absurd.

The aspect of Soviet politics which attracted the lion's share of attention was the question of leadership. Much effort was expended on scrutinizing Politburo politics and second-guessing the moves of the general secretary. This stress on the importance of leadership was congruent with the idea that the system was essentially stable—it is only worth studying the captain's orders if the crew is going to carry them out. But the assumption that power was still concentrated in the Kremlin contradicted the idea that the USSR possessed a Western-style political system. Liberal Sovietologists apparently saw no incongruity between their obsession with Gorbachev and their assertion that the system was essentially pluralist.

Rather than seeing perestroika as the harbinger of a profound social crisis, most authors preferred to slot it into their comfortable paradigm of leadership struggle. For

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[28]Walter C. Clemens, *The USSR and Global Interdependence* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1978).

[29]See for example Jerry F. Hough, *Russia and the West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

[30]See, for example, Susan G. Solomon, ed., *Pluralism in the Soviet Union* (New York: Macmillan, 1983); H. Gordon Skilling and Franklyn Griffiths, eds., *Interest Groups in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

[31]See, for example, Gail W. Lapidus, "State and Society: Toward the emergence of civil society in the Soviet Union," in Seweryn Bialer, ed., *Politics, Society and Nationality Inside Gorbachev's Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); S. Frederick Starr, "The Changing Nature of Change in the USSR," in Seweryn Bialer and Michael Mandelbaum, eds., *Gorbachev's Russia and American Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988).

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them, perestroika was just the latest example of what one of them described as the "familiar cycle" which has repeated itself throughout Soviet and Russian history.[32] In the post-Stalin era, this played out as a contest between the general secretary and his conservative colleagues. Analysts argued back and forth over whether the leader's power was greatest at the beginning of his period in office (the honeymoon effect) or whether it increased over time (thanks to patronage).[33] Unfortunately, these debates distracted attention from the question of the Kremlin's ability to influence events in the country at large. In the 1980s the Politburo's power and authority were hemorrhaging at an accelerating rate, and by 1989 Gorbachev was far from being the omnipotent leader portrayed in the West.

Writers of a conservative bent regarded the USSR as an unnatural creation that would sooner or later go the way of all empires. However, most of them thought it would be later rather than sooner, and so were stuck with having to explain the obstinate presence of what George Urban described as a "ramshackle but functioning empire."[34] Writing in 1989, Urban went on to argue that "One cannot see any Soviet leader's experimentation with reform carrying him to a point where the self-questioning of the system would drive it to self-destruction."

In his 1984 work, *Survival Is Not Enough*, Richard Pipes saw the USSR as entering a "revolutionary situation"—but lacking a group capable of making a revolution.[35] Because of Russia's innate conservatism, reform would only result from a profound crisis. But Pipes was ambiguous as to whether such reforms would lead to transformation or collapse. For Jeane Kirkpatrick, the main question in her 1990 collection of essays was the reversibility of the reforms, rather than the survival of the system.[36] Contemplating the disturbances in the Baltic in November 1988, she commented that "None of this means that the Soviet Union is falling apart." She was correct in arguing that totalitarian regimes, unlike their authoritarian counterparts, do not cycle in and out of power. But she did not go one step further and discuss the possibility that such a system could collapse.

For a glimpse of thinking that received serious attention in the U.S. government, we can turn to a book entitled *The Future of the Soviet Empire*, put together by RAND Corporation specialists in 1987.[37] The authors could not bring themselves to imagine that the Soviet elite would voluntarily relinquish its control over the coercive apparatus. The empire in the book's title is the external one: there was no specific chapter on nationalism, and the editors considered that "increased alienation and disaffection [among non-Russians], rather than substantially increased active dissidence, seems in store."

The dominant analytical framework in the RAND collection was that of the "guns vs. butter" trade-off. As economic crisis deepened and the burden of empire mounted, the USSR would be forced to divert resources from its military budget. This is undoubtedly part of the story, but 1991 showed that it was not the decisive factor. Although the guns vs.

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[32]Herbert Ellison's introduction to Lawrence W. Lerner and Donald Treadgold, eds., *Gorbachev and the Soviet Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 19.

[33]Archibald H. Brown, "The Era of Gorbachev?," in Lerner and Treadgold, Ibid.; Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders*; Valerie Bunce, *Do New Leaders Make a Difference?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1981).

[34]Urban, p. viii.

[35]Richard Pipes, *Survival Is Not Enough* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 199. See also his "Can the Soviet Union Reform?" *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1984).

[36]Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *The Withering Away of the Soviet State* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1990), pp. 82-87.

[37]Rowen and Wolf, *The Future of the Soviet Empire.*

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butter metaphor has intuitive appeal (even though the phrase was coined by Nazi propagandist, Joseph Goebbels), it is misleading. There was more to Soviet budgetary planning than a divide-the-dollar game. Moreover, there is no econometric evidence that states anywhere actually make such a trade off. Countries have more guns and butter if the economy is growing, and less of both if the economy is declining. It is very difficult (in either market or command economies) to transfer resources from one sector to the other.

A Look Back at the Soviet Future

OVER THE YEARS many conferences and monographs were devoted to predicting the Soviet future.[38] The most important question which analysts had to confront was the reformability of the USSR. Was the system capable of adaptation? And would reforms make the system more stable or less so? Alternative scenarios produced five possible outcomes:

a) Systemic change in a liberal direction (perestroika). This was the ruling paradigm, accounting for at least 60 percent of the Sovietological output. It flowed directly from the mind-set of mainstream Sovietology, outlined above. The paradigm's dominance is a result of many factors, not least wishful thinking and a lingering belief in History as Progress. It helped that perestroika was also the official Soviet interpretation of what was going on, energetically spread by the Moscow academics who were the main source of information for most Western journalists and Sovietologists.

b) Systemic change in a reactionary direction. This option had a few subscribers among Western scholars, but was popular among émigrés, who saw Russian nationalism as the most likely candidate to fill the vacuum caused by the erosion of Marxism. Alexander Yanov, one of the leading exponents of this view, criticized both liberal and conservative Sovietologists for failing to give due weight to the possibility of a nationalist takeover.[39] Solzhenitsyn may also be included in this category, since he was waiting for some sort of moral revolt by the Russian people. Events showed, however, that Russian national consciousness was even more debilitated by seventy-four years of communism than these writers imagined.

c) The System collapses quickly due to failed reforms. Virtually no one explored this scenario—which turned out to be what actually transpired. The handful are discussed below. Among the first to spell out the imminence of the apocalypse was Martin Malia (alias "Z").[40] Also in spring 1990, Charles Fairbanks wrote that "The end of rule in Moscow by people who identify themselves as communists...will probably come by 1995. It could conceivably happened as early as this summer."[41]

d) The system muddles through without major reform. This was the second most popular scenario, favored by perhaps 25 percent

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[38]For example: George W. Breslauer, *Five Images of the Soviet Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Rowen and Wolf, *The Future of the Soviet Empire*; Robert Conquest, ed., *The Last Empire* (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, 1986); Terry McNeil, "Images of the Soviet Future: The Western Scholarly Debate," in Shtromas and Kaplan, *The Soviet Union and the Challenge of the Future.* One of the most influential prognoses was Barrington Moore, Jr., *Terror and Progress: USSR* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), in which he sketched three models: Asiatic despotism, totalitarianism and a "rational-technical" society.

[39]Alexander Yanov, "Is Sovietology Reformable?", in Robert O. Crummey, ed., *Reform in Russia and the USSR* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 1989).

[40]"Z," "To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedalus* (Winter 1990).

[41]Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "The Suicide of Soviet Communism," *Journal of Democracy* (Spring 1990), p. 25.

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of authors (including the present one) on both the left and right wings of the discipline.[42] Extrapolation of past trends into the future is the reflex response of social scientists, *faut de mieux*. If the system had lasted for seventy-four years, it seemed safe to infer that it would survive a couple more.

e) The system slowly collapses due to chronic problems.

Many authors argued that the system's chronic problems would eventually cause its downfall, although they rarely laid out a timetable, or suggested precisely how such a collapse would come about. Chronic ailments, after all, are not necessarily fatal.

The weakness of the economy is obviously a prime candidate in explaining the collapse. However, although the economy experienced a declining rate of growth in the 1970s, it was still growing. The real breakdown only began after 1988, and this was as much a product of political processes as their cause.[43]

It is true that Russia suffered from rising rates of morbidity and mortality, crime, pollution, alcoholism, and so forth. But exactly how these social problems would translate into the overthrow of the political system was something of a mystery. Alcoholics do not make good revolutionaries (and August 1991 showed that they make lousy putschists).

Many specialists saw the multi-national character of the Soviet state as its Achilles Heel, but few thought that a break-up was imminent.[44] Alexander Motyl concluded that the "non-Russians will not rebel, because they cannot rebel," given the power of the security apparatus, which even economic decline would not diminish.[45] For Motyl, republican elites were too dependent on Moscow to risk playing the nationalist card.

Most writers on nationality issues specialized in individual republics and avoided discussion of systemic stability. Perhaps the most widely used text on nationality policy was the volume *Nationalities and Reform in Soviet Politics* by Mark Beissinger and Lubomyr Hajda.[46] In their conclusion the editors focused on Gorbachev's agenda, and rather than regard the USSR as a doomed empire (it "straddles the divide between state and empire") they looked ahead to a new "non-imperial formula for legitimacy."

Those nationality specialists who did predict the collapse of the USSR, such as Helene Carrere D'Encausse, saw the demographic time-bomb of Central Asia as the decisive factor.[47] Extrapolation of Muslim birth rates implied the Islamicization of the army and thus the erosion of one of the central pillars of Soviet power. Population pressure would also force the Central Asian leaders to demand more resources from Moscow and an end to the region's colonial dependence on cotton. In the event, however, Muslim demographics were irrelevant to the collapse of the USSR, and the Central Asian leaders were among the last and most ardent defenders of the Union. It was the Western nationalisms which pried open the cracks in the Soviet empire. While Sovietologists recognized the strength of national feeling in these peripheral Western

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[42]See for example Timothy J. Colton, *The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union* (New York: Council on Foreign Affairs, 1987); and conclusion in Byrnes, *After Brezhnev*.

[43]For an example of crying wolf over the economy, see Marshall Goldman, USSR *in Crisis: The Failure of an Economic System* (New York: Norton, 1983).

[44]Teresa Rakowska Harmstone, "Minority Nationalisms," in Conquest, *The Last Empire*, p. 254.

[45]Alexander J. Motyl, *Will the non-Russians Rebel?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 169, 170.

[46]Lubomyr Hajda and Mark Beissinger, *Nationalities and Reform in Soviet Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

[47]Helene Carrere D'Encausse, *Confiscated Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1990).

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regions, no one foresaw the role they would play in bringing down the USSR.[48]

Learning from Failure

SOVIETOLOGY UTTERLY failed to foresee the speed and scope of the fall of the USSR. The collapse proved the intellectual approach of the Soviet studies community to be deeply flawed, in that it exaggerated the system's stability and the scope for top-down reform. Even among those few writers who had tried to sketch alternative futures for the USSR, only a handful even raised the possibility of system collapse.

Some might complain that these judgments are being made with the benefit of hindsight, to which I would plead guilty. What is the alternative to being wise after the event—to remain ignorant? The failure of Sovietology should not, however, be an occasion for despair and recrimination. Few social scientists have been put in the position of having their models so spectacularly disproven—and, as Karl Popper argued, falsification can be a powerful engine for the advancement of learning.

However, this grand falsification will only serve to improve understanding if the profession shows itself willing to face up to the magnitude of its failure. There is little sign that this is about to happen. It is true that the major research centers are all running "What went wrong?" seminars. Contrary to what one might expect, though, at such gatherings *mea culpas* are rather thin on the ground. Indeed, having attended half a dozen such meetings, I have yet to hear a single contributor stand up and explain how his or her own approach was flawed.[49] (On the contrary, many people seem to be convincing themselves that they had really foreseen the collapse all along.) In fact, the real purpose of these meetings, usually implicit but sometimes explicit, is damage control. Academics are worried about losing their Title 8 funds, about falling student enrollments, about disappearing grant money. These are all legitimate concerns—but are not conducive to a frank discussion of the intellectual flaws of the discipline.

No doubt Sovietology will make great strides forward in the next few years, as more memoirs are published and documents slowly released. The last major surge in our knowledge of the Soviet system came in the mid-1950s, with the publications from the Harvard interview project. This time around, however, scholars will be able to interview not displaced persons and ex-POWs, but former members of the Politburo and Central Committee.

These new opportunities should help to fill the gaps in our knowledge, for it is certain that a full and convincing answer to why the Soviet Union collapsed when it did is not within our grasp at present.

Sovietology failed to provide such an explanation, not because of a lack of sound methodology or a sinister political conspiracy to distort reality, but because of a failure of imagination. □

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[48]Even Alexander Shtromas, writing in 1986, saw the Balts as ready for independence but destined to wait on developments elsewhere—A. Shtromas, "The Baltic States," in Conquest, *The Last Empire*, p. 207. Gerhard Simon argues in his preface that he predicted the break-up would begin in the West when his book was published in Germany in 1986—Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991). While the book is useful in showing how centrifugal forces were increasing in the 1970s, the claims in his preface are not really sustained in the text.

[49]See for example, Fleron and Hoffman, "Sovietology and Perestroika"; William E. Odom, "Soviet Politics and After," *World Politics* (October 1992); and Thomas F. Remington, "Common knowledge: Soviet political studies and the problem of system stability," paper delivered at the Kennan Institute, October 1992.

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Part III

Intellectuals and Communism

Saul Bellow

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Writers, Intellectuals, Politics

Mainly Reminiscence

Saul Bellow

WHEN THE BOLSHEVIKS took power in 1917 I was two years old. My parents had emigrated from St. Petersburg to Montreal in 1913 so events in Russia were on their minds, and at the dinner table the Czar, the war, the front, Lenin, Trotsky were mentioned as often as parents, sisters and brothers in the old country. Among Jews it was scarcely conceivable that the great monarchy should have fallen. Skeptical older immigrants believed that the Bolshevik upstarts would soon be driven out. Their grown children, however, were keen to join the revolution and I can remember how my father argued in the street with Lyova, the son of our Hebrew teacher, who said he had already bought his *schiffskarte*. My father shouted that the new regime was worthless, but the young were then accustomed to respect their elders, so Lyova smiled—deferential but immovable. He went off to build a new order under Lenin and Trotsky. And he disappeared.

Much later, after we had moved to Chicago and I was old enough to read Marx and Lenin, my father would say, "Don't you forget what happened to Lyova—and I haven't heard from my sisters in years. I don't want any part of your Russia and your Lenin."

But in my eyes my parents were Russians with agreeable Russian traits. They had brought with them a steamer trunk filled with St. Petersburg finery—brocaded vests, a top-hat, a tail-coat, linen sleeping-suits with pleated fronts, black taffeta petticoats, ostrich feathers and button boots with high heels. Of no use in the dim Ultima Thule of Montreal or in proletarian Chicago, they were the playthings of the younger children. The older ones quickly and eagerly Americanized themselves in the U.S. and the rest soon followed suit. The country took us over. It *was* a country then, not a collection of "cultures." We felt that to be here was a great piece of luck. The children of immigrants in my Chicago high school, however, believed that they were also somehow Russian, and while they studied their *Macbeth* and Milton's *L'Allegro*, they read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as well and went on inevitably to Lenin's *State and Revolution*, and the pamphlets of Trotsky. The Tuley High-School debating club discussed the *Communist Manifesto* and on the main stem of the neighborhood, Division Street, the immigrant intelligentsia lectured from soapboxes, while at "the forum," a church hall on California Avenue, debates between socialists, communists, and anarchists attracted a fair number of people. This was the beginning of my radical education. For on the recommendation of friends I took up Marx and Engels, and remember, in my father's bleak office near the freight yards, blasting away at Marx's "Value, Price, and Profit"

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while the police raided a brothel across the street—for non-payment of protection, probably—throwing beds, bedding and chairs through the shattered windows.

The Young Communist League tried to recruit me in the early thirties. Too late—I had already read Trotsky's pamphlet on the German question and was convinced that Stalin's errors had brought Hitler to power.

Curious how widely information of world politics was disseminated and in what odd corners around the globe positions then were taken. When the poet Mandelstam interviewed a Comintern member in 1923 he asked, "'How has Gandhi's movement affected you in Indochina? Have you experienced any vibrations, any echoes?' 'No,' answered my companion."—Nguyen Ai Quoc known to us later as Ho Chih Minh. Mandelstam describes him to us: "At heart he is but a boy, thin and lithe, sporting a knitted wool jacket."

Few boys, I need hardly say, became Comintern members. For millions of them worldwide, however, the October Revolution was a great reverberator whose echoes of freedom and justice you could not choose but hear. That revolution was for many decades the most important, most prestigious event in history. Its partisans held that it had brought to an end the most monstrous of wars and that Russia's revolutionary proletariat had made mankind the gift of a great hope. Now the oppressed everywhere, under communist leadership, would destroy decadent capitalist imperialism. In Depression Chicago, boys at heart—and girls as well—were putting their revolutionary thoughts in order. The program was not very clear but the prospect was immensely thrilling. Full ideological clarity would not arrive for some time.

In college (1933) I was a Trotskyist. Trotsky instilled into his young followers the orthodoxy peculiar to the defeated and ousted. We belonged to the Movement, we were faithful to Leninism, and could expound its historical lessons and describe Stalin's crimes. My closest friends and I were not, however, activists, we were writers. Owing to the Depression we had no career expectations. We got through the week on five or six bucks, and if our rented rooms were small, the libraries were lofty, were beautiful. Through "revolutionary politics" we met the demand of the times for action. But what really mattered was the vital personal nourishment we took from Dostoevsky or Herman Melville, from Dreiser and John Dos Passos and Faulkner. By filling out a slip of paper at the Crerar Library on Randolph Street you could get all the bound volumes of *The Dial* and fill long afternoons with T.S. Eliot, Rilke and E.E. Cummings.

Toward the end of the thirties the *Partisan Review* was our own *Dial*, with politics besides. There we had access to our significant European contemporaries—Silone, Orwell, Koestler, Malraux, Andre Gide and Auden. Partisan's leading American contributors were Marxists—critics and philosophers like Dwight Macdonald, James Burnham, Sidney Hook, Clement Greenberg, Meyer Schapiro and Harold Rosenberg. The *PR* intellectuals had sided with Trotsky, quite naturally, during the Moscow Trials. Hook had persuaded his teacher John Dewey to head a commission of inquiry in Mexico. We followed the proceedings bitterly, passionately, for we were, of course, the Outs; the Stalinists were the Ins. We alone in the U.S.A. knew what a bad lot they were. F.D.R. and his New Dealers didn't have a clue, they understood neither Russia nor Communism.

But our own Movement, we began to learn, was often foolish, even conspicuously absurd. During the Spanish Civil War the issue of material aid for the Spanish Republic was furiously debated by comrades who didn't have a dime to contribute. A more serious challenge to our loyalty was the invasion of Finland by the Red Army. Trotsky argued that a Worker's State could not by definition wage an imperialist war.

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The invasion was progressive since it would nationalize property, an irrevocable step toward socialism. Faithful to the October Revolution, Trotsky fought the dissenters, of whom there were now many. The split this led to did not come to the attention of the American public, which in any case would have preferred Disney's "Fantasia" to our kind.

Although I now drifted away from Marxist politics, I still admired Lenin and Trotsky. After all I had first heard of them in the high-chair while eating my mashed potatoes. How could I forget that Trotsky had created the Red Army, that he had read French novels at the Front while defeating Denikin. That great crowds had been swayed by his coruscating speeches. The glamor of the Revolution still cast its spell. Besides the most respected literary and intellectual figures had themselves yielded to it. Returning from a visit to Russia, Edmund Wilson had spoken about "the moral light at the top of the world," and it was Wilson who had introduced us to Joyce and Proust. His history of revolutionary thought, *To the Finland Station*, was published in 1940. By that time Poland had been invaded and France had fallen to the Nazis.

1940 was also the year of Trotsky's assassination. I was in Mexico at the time and an acquaintance of the Old Man, a European lady whom I had met in Taxco, had arranged a meeting. Trotsky agreed to receive my friend Herbert Passin and me in Coyoacan. It was on the morning of our appointment that he was struck down and when we reached Mexico City we were met by the headlines. When we went to his villa we must have been taken for foreign journalists, and we were directed to the hospital. The emergency room was in disorder. We had only to ask for Trotsky. A door into a small side room was opened for us and there we saw him. He had just died. A cone of bloody bandages was on his head. His cheeks, his nose, his beard, his throat were streaked with blood and with dried iridescent trickles of iodine.

He is reported to have said once that Stalin could kill him whenever he liked, and now we understood what a far-reaching power could do with us; how easy it was for a despot to order a death; how little it took to kill us, how slight a hold we, with our historical philosophies, our ideas, programs, purposes, wills, had on the matter we were made of.

THE GREAT Depression was a time of personal humiliation for those who had worked and lived in respectable prosperity. Capitalism seemed to have lost its control over the country. To many the overthrow of the government looked like a distinct possibility. In the early depression years the policies dictated by the Communist leadership during its rigid and grim Third Period had had little success in the U.S.A. A new Popular Front policy was announced when Hitler began to demolish the parties of the Left. For American communists the Popular Front, temperate and apparently conciliatory, was a bonanza. The Party was freed from its foreign sounding jargon and began instead to speak the language of Wobblies and working stiffs. Embracing native populism it sang folk songs and played guitars. Not Lenin and Stalin but Jefferson and Lincoln sat at the center of the new pantheon. The New Deal philosophy of F.D.R. as we heard it in fireside chats generated warmth and confidence. Henry Wallace announced that this was the century of the common man. The Popular Front identified itself with this new populism and the C.P. learned for the first time how heady it was to be in the mainstream of national life. The country appeared to be having a great cultural revival. Writers and actors were attracted by well-endowed Front organizations and Fellow-Travelling groups. The Left had struck it rich.

I was myself a not ungrateful beneficiary of the New Deal. Toward the end of the thirties I was employed by the W.P.A. Writer's Project. Our stars in the Chicago office were Jack Conroy and Nelson

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Algren—neither of them out of favor with the Communist Party. Algren was indeed an original, unfortunately susceptible to ideological infection, a radical bohemian in a quickly dated Chicago style. Few of the younger generation of gifted writers were untouched by the Popular Front influence. I refer not only to those who were later victimized in the hysteria generated by McCarthy, but also to certain of the more prestigious contributors to *The Nation* and *The New Republic* who had gone along with the C.P. during the Civil War in Spain (e.g. Malcolm Cowley). The Popular Front style was distinctive and its "culture" was easily recognizable in writers like Clifford Odets, Lillian Hellman, or Dalton Trumbo, or in critics or radio-writers who may as well remain nameless. It survives even now and you need do no more than mention Whittaker Chambers or Alger Hiss or J. Robert Oppenheimer or the Rosenbergs at a dinner table to learn how durable the issues and dogmas of the thirties and the early postwar years have remained.

IT IS PERFECTLY true, as Charles Fairbanks has suggested, that totalitarianism in our century has shaped the very definition of what an intellectual is. The "vanguard fighters" who acted under Lenin's direction in October were intellectuals, and perhaps the glamor of this event had its greatest effect on intellectuals in the West. Among political activists this was sufficiently evident, but the Bolshevik model was immensely influential everywhere. Trotsky and T.E. Lawrence were perhaps the most outstanding of the intellectual activists to emerge from World War I—the former as Lenin's principal executive, Lawrence as the delicate scholar and recluse, a Shakespearian Fortinbras materializing in the Arabian desert. Malraux was inspired by both men, obviously, an aesthete and a theorist, eager in his first phase for revolutionary action and manifesting a curious relish for violence in a great cause. It was he that set an example for French writers of the forties. Sartre was certainly one of his descendants, and many in France and elsewhere modeled themselves upon him, up to the time when he abjured revolution. There was a trace of this also in Arthur Koestler, who so often exposed himself to personal danger, but it was in France between the thirties and the time of Regis Debray that leftist intellectuals presented themselves in the West as soldiers of the revolution.

The Leninist style was adopted by Berlin intellectuals in the twenties. Bertold Brecht's *The Measures Taken* represents the central precept of Leninism, namely the primacy of the party, and it dramatizes with great power the tragedy of disobedience—the failure of a party worker to achieve the utter self-effacement demanded by "History." Martin Esslin tells us most vividly about Brecht himself—the public persona of the literary *enfant terrible*, the truck driver's jacket and dirty visored cap he wore. In proletarian costume he "drove around Berlin at great speed" but wore the steel-rimmed glasses of a "minor civil-servant or village school-master." Lenin himself has been characterized as a gymnasium teacher from Simbirsk: the Great Headmaster is what Wilson calls him. A powerhouse disguised as a pedant.

The Lenin style was also favored by bohemian intellectuals in Greenwich Village. A valuable comment on this has been made by the art critic Clement Greenburg, who was himself preoccupied with the Great Headmaster's personality. He says of Brecht, "Lenin's precepts became for him an eternal standard of conduct, and Bolshevism a way of life and a habit of virtue..." And in another place: "...the followers of Lenin and Trotsky—like little men aping the externals of those they follow—have cultivated in themselves that narrowness which passes for self-oblivious devotion, that harshness in personal relations and above all that devastating incapacity for experience which have become hallmarks

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and standard traits of the Communist 'professional revolutionary'...it is the cultivated and trained narrowness...which frightens away imagination and spontaneity..." These animadversions, when I read them years ago, increased my respect for Greenberg; I found in them an unusual gift for self insight. He had carried himself like a Lenin of the arts. Many of the gifted intellectuals of that time took on a Leninist coloration. They were "hard." To them "lives" and "personalities" were unreal bourgeois conceits, extensions of the idea of property. You eliminated, you cut down to size, you put down frailties and fashions, you welcomed the avant-garde and destroyed kitsch with revolutionary mental rays.

The Russian Revolution was made by a small band of intellectuals under the direction of Lenin, their chief theoretician. Small wonder that intellectuals in the West should have been intoxicated by such an example.

Some of these people were authentic originals and impressively intelligent (Harold Rosenberg for example). The more clear-headed of the Village intellectuals toward the end of the thirties were beginning to understand that the Revolution was a disaster. Few of them, however, turned away from Marxism. One way or another they clung to the texts that had made intellectuals of them. The Marxist fundamentals had organized their minds and gave them an enduring advantage over unfocused rivals educated helter-skelter in American universities. What you invest your energy and enthusiasm in when you are young you can never bring yourself to give up altogether. I came to New York toward the end of the thirties, muddled in the head but keen to educate myself, and toward the end of the forties I had become a contributor to the *Partisan Review* and a Villager. All around us was commercial America. The Village was halfway between Madison Avenue and Wall Street. Its center lay in Washington Square. From her apartment facing the benches and the elms Eleanor Roosevelt might have seen, had they been pointed out to her, some of the most eminent intellectuals in the country discussing French politics, American painting, Freud and Marx, André Gide and Jean Cocteau. Everyone was avid for high-minded, often wildly speculative talk.

For Darwin it was the struggle for existence that mattered; for me, in those years, it was the struggle for conversation. There was no existence without it. There were notable talkers in this group of anticommunist leftists: Dwight Macdonald, tall, loosely held together, bearded, goggled, a rapid stammerer; Rahv, with his deep breathy Russian rumble; Harold Rosenberg, extraordinarily fluent, persuasive, domineering, subtle and sharp; Paul Goodman, both canny and visionary, looking beyond you as he laid down the law on psychiatry, poetry, anarchism and sex.

Among these thinkers small distinction was made between an intellectual and a writer. The culture heroes who mattered were those who had ideas. Sidney Hook, in many respects a sensible man, once said to me that Faulkner was an excellent writer whose books would be greatly improved by dynamic ideas. "I'd be glad to give him some," he said. "It would make a tremendous difference. Do you know him?"

There was indeed much for us to understand: history, philosophy, science, the Cold War, mass society, pop art, high art, psychoanalysis, existentialism, the Russian question, the Jewish question. Yet I quickly saw—or rather (since I don't see quickly) I intuited—that writers seldom were intellectuals. "A bit of ideology and being up to date is most *apropos*," Chekhov said, tongue in cheek I suspect. In a more serious vein he wrote that writers "should engage in politics only enough to protect themselves from politics." "Absence of lengthy verbiage, of a political-social-economic nature," was one of his rules, and he recommended also objectivity, brevity, audacity, the avoidance of stereotypes, and compassion. (Ah, for the

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days before such words had fallen into disrepute.)

I don't intend just now to go farther into the differences between cognition and imagination; I simply note that I avoided anything resembling a choice by following my bent. I can't remember that I ever tried to discuss art versus politics with other writers. At a visiting fireman's dinner, years later, I once asked Günther Grass why he was campaigning so hard for Willi Brandt. Should writers go into politics? He turned a silent glare upon me as if it outraged him (on this evening, he was the fireman) to be seated beside a village idiot.

Only in America! he may have thought.

FOR IN EUROPE writers accepted politics as their absolute. This, as I learned during my Paris years (1948-50), was the thing to do. 1948 was a peculiarly bleak and bitter year. Coal, gasoline, even bread were still being rationed. That Paris was the capital of world civilization could no longer be taken for granted. French thinkers and writers struggled to maintain its preeminence. Americans, recently cheered as liberators, were not warmly received, the Right being nearly as hard on them as the Left. Mauriac in his columns expressed a decided preference for the Russians—for Russian rather than American literature. (Up to a point I could agree with him.) On the Left only Americans who had been ideologically vetted were accepted. The rest were thought to be spies. And French-speakers were especially tricky—very likely double agents. Lifelong francophiles like my friend H.J. Kaplan were suspect, whereas Richard Wright was immediately welcomed, and the Existentialists who met in the bar of the Pont Royal soon had him reading Husserl, whom I ignorantly held in great respect. I might have become an intellectual, but this makes me think of the prostitute in the French cartoon who said, "*J'aurais pu faire la religieuse*." Seeing Wright in St. Germain des Près deep in a thick difficult book I asked him why this was necessary, and he told me that it was indispensable reading for all writers and that I had better get a copy of my own. I wasn't quite ready for Husserl. As often as possible I went to music halls and the *Cirque d'Hiver*. Still I did keep up with French ideas, read Sartre in *Les Temps Modernes*, and Camus in *Combat*. I also took in an occasional lecture at the *Collège de Philosophie*.

The bitterness of defeat, occupation and liberation pervaded post-war Paris. An atmosphere of disgrace and resentment darkened the famous facades and made the Seine (at least to me) look and smell medicinal. This oppressiveness I was later persuaded was an early symptom of the Cold War. For the time being the French lay helpless between the USSR and the United States. The communist alternative, so far as I could judge, held an edge in public opinion, so that you couldn't have your hair cut without enduring torrents of Marxism from the barber. I had come to Paris, as Americans generally did, to be educated, and the general ignorance of the history of the Soviet Union in all quarters came as a great surprise. Reading Sartre I said to myself Chicago-style, "this has got to be a con." A con on my turf was a shade more venial than a lie. I preferred to believe that Sartre's curious behavior was deliberate, Machiavellian. His hatred of the bourgeoisie was so excessive that he was inclined to go easy on the crimes of Stalin. On the intellectual Dow-Jones—if there had been such a thing—his credentials, before I began to read him, would have been comparable to preferred stock. But the facts were readily available, and that he should know so little about them was a great disappointment. He spoke in Marxist style of an oppressive bourgeois ideology, and while he admitted his bourgeois origins, his aim was to create a revolutionary public. Himself an heir of the Eighteenth century *philosophes*, he would speak to the proletariat as his literary ancestors had spoken to the bourgeoisie, bringing

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political self-awareness to those who were to be the revolutionaries of today. He asserted that the working man seeking liberation would liberate all of us as well, and for all times. The French C.P. was an obstacle standing between Sartre and the working class. As for existentialism, he readily conceded that it was a phenomenon produced by the decomposition of the bourgeois carcass. The only public at present available to him came, disgustingly, from the intelligent sector of the rotting bourgeoisie (victims no doubt, but tyrants also).

"Were the author an Englishman we should here know that our leg was being pulled," wrote Wyndham Lewis in *The Writer and the Absolute*. "But Sartre does not smile...he is at his wits end what to do." Lewis seems wryly sympathetic. And he does here and there agree with Sartre and quotes him approvingly when he declares that we are living in the age of the Hoax. "National Socialism, Gaullism, Catholicism, French communism are hoaxes—consciousness is deluded and we can only safeguard literature by disillusioning or enlightening our public...Sartre believes all that the communists believe," Lewis concludes, "But he did not wish to convert this *collage* into a marriage." He says that Sartre was a fellow traveler in the *front populaire*. "He engaged in a path in those days which leads either to communism or to nothing. It was the *néant* that he chose."

My own guess in 1949—when I was immature: not young, only, as I now see, underdeveloped—was that French intellectuals were preparing themselves, perhaps positioning themselves, for a Russian victory. Their Marxism also reflected the repugnance they felt for the other superpower. There were comparable anti-American sentiments in England. Graham Greene, like many writers (and civil servants) of his generation, abominated the U.S.A. and its politics. Successive English governments agreed on the whole with the American line, but Greene found ways to transfer part of the odium at least from London to Washington. On our side of the Atlantic he had a big following. Educated Americans, establishment haters, dearly love to see our society and its official policies loused up. "The main enemy is at home," was Lenin's wartime slogan. Of all his ideas it may well be the most durable.

When I revert to those times I can take no pleasure in having spotted the errors of Sartre *et al.* I am disheartened rather by the failure of all these aspirations for justice and progress. I can understand that as crisis succeeded crisis no one wanted to surrender to passivity. It is sad to watch so much ingenuity invested in leaky theories. Behind the Iron Curtain, experiencing totalitarianism directly, people had a clearer orientation.

IN THE WEST there was a certain opinion-consumerism. One asked oneself, what shall I think: this or that? Sidney Hook in his autobiography scorns the *Partisan Review* intellectuals, the respectable left. His description of them makes them look like small business types, importers of foreign specialties in a highbrow artistic mall. Mere talkers, Hook thought, some of them had no taste for real politics. Moreover, they believed that World War II was an imperialist war exactly like the first. Since they were not the kind of Leninists who aimed to lead a putsch in Washington, their analyses of England and Germany did bring to mind the theologians of Lilliput. The account given by Hook, the stalwart Cold Warrior, of their confused Marxism was, four decades later, still edged with bitterness. But the fact that we can do nothing does not preclude wanting to be right, and everyone was then intent on the one true position. "I had to turn my heavy guns on Dwight Macdonald and the others," Hook would tell me in his last years. But no one has ever examined the connection between helplessness and holding the right views. Following contemporary events is in a way like reading history. To read history is essential, but what in actuality can we do

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about it? The novelist Stanley Elkin in an essay called "The First Amendment as an Art Form" asks, "Who in old times ever held anything so uncalled for as an opinion?...History, history *really* was, still is, the agenda of activists. The rest of us, you, me, the rest of us are mere fans of a world view and use the news like theater—episodes, chapters in some Sabbath soul serial." He goes on to say that if we don't have the gift for effecting change we have "the solace of criticism."

Granted, activists like Hook made a difference. Their contribution to victory in the Cold War can't be measured but must be acknowledged. It was Hook, taking Hook as representative of any number of thinkers and activists—Hook, not Sartre, whose views prevailed, and should have prevailed. And what Mr. Elkin does is to report accurately on the state of opinion in a democracy like ours. What we need to consider is the combining of theorizing with effectiveness. I give Hook full marks for the wars he fought and admire him despite his evident lack of sympathy with my way of looking at things. He was the active, not the contemplative sort, not so much a philosopher as an ex-philosopher. On one of the last evenings I spent with him he told me that philosophy was no more. I asked what the Ph.D.s he had educated were doing with themselves. They were working in hospitals as ethicists, he said. That didn't make him unhappy either. I don't think that the end of the Cold War signifies that theorizing is bankrupt. To obtain a clear picture of the modern project, to give the best possible account of the crisis of the West, is still a necessity.

Politics as a vocation I take seriously. But it's not my vocation. And on the whole writers are not much good at it. The positions they take are generally set for them by intellectuals. Or by themselves, insofar as they are intellectuals (e.g. the case of Sartre). Those anticommunist intellectuals and publicists with whom I have agreed on issues of the Cold War, though they tend to be high-toned and swollen with cultural pride and *suffisance*, are often philistine in their tastes. Their opposite numbers on the Left are in this respect, a mess entirely.

My policy has therefore been to avoid occasions that bring writers together. When President Johnson invited some twenty or thirty "leaders of the arts" to the White House, I foolishly accepted. I thought I would announce my opposition to Vietnam in a letter to the *Times* and I could then attend the jambouree—in order to show my respect for the Presidency. These principles! I have a weakness for stupid loftiness. Robert Lowell, who boycotted the event, had telephoned me more than once to concert a strategy for the afternoon. I gathered that he and his group were giving me a clearance to participate—somebody like me *should* be inside. The White House that day was filled with the cries of Lowell's supporters whom I will call the pros; the cons were in the minority. The journalists covering the event were as noisy and furious as the writers. The climax for me was the appearance of the uninvited Dwight Macdonald, tall, satyr-bearded, goggled, walking into the Rose Garden in sneakers, the great bohemian himself going around with a resolution endorsing Lowell's boycott. Many signed. L.B.J. afterwards said the whole thing was nothing but an insult. "They insult me by comin', they insult me by stayin' away."

Philip Rahv set me straight about this. "You got put on the spot by Cal Lowell. He's a crafty schemer. When he gets into maneuvering that way, nobody has a chance with that dreamy poet."

The last literary meeting I can remember to have attended was the International PEN Congress in New York. There I was assigned to a panel on "The State and the Alienation of the Writer"—a superfluous and foolish topic. In a short talk (the shorter the better on this occasion) I said that our government hardly bothered with writers at all. The Founders had put together an enlightened plan for equality, stability, jus-

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tice, relief from poverty and so forth. Art, philosophy, and the higher concerns of mankind are not the business of the state. The emphasis here is on well-being and on a practical sort of humanitarianism. With the help of science we would conquer nature and force her to provide for us. Scarcity was to be abolished. On the whole I believed this program had met with success. In a commercial society nothing prevents one from writing novels or painting water colors, but culture does not get the same attention as crops or manufacture or banking. I concluded by saying that many of the material objectives of the Founders had been successfully realized.

Before I could step down Günther Grass had risen to attack me from the floor. He said that he had just visited the South Bronx and that the poor blacks who lived in those monstrous streets could not agree that they were free and equal. The horrors they endured were not at all like the picture of American success I had just held up. The hall was crowded with writers and intellectuals. Grass had just lighted the ideological fuse and out came a tremendous boom, a blast of anger from delegates and visitors. Replying as well as I could in the uproar I said that of course American cities were going to hell in a hurry, they had become monstrous. I tried also to indicate that corrective actions, if there were any, could only be taken by a rich society, and this seemed to prove that the material objectives of the Founders had indeed been met. I added, since this was a PEN Conference, that writers in politics hadn't done at all well. In this connection I mentioned Brecht and Feuchtwanger in Germany. Grass protested that he was always being put down in America as a communist.

You have to hand it to the social visionaries and liberators: they know how to get the high ground and keep it. They are masters also of the equivalence game: you have spoken well of the American system because you are an apologist for it and a stooge; you are not concerned about the poor and you are a racist to boot. He had pressed the agitprop button, up went a familiar semaphore. To this semaphore the agitated crowd responded with a conditioned reflex. "I am afraid that great German writers do not have to know in order to pronounce," Melvin Lasky has written apropos of Grass.

Grass seems to have believed I was justifying the Establishment—that moth-eaten shroud. No, I was simply describing what there is to see. A brief quotation from an exceptionally clear-minded political theorist, Allan Bloom, will show better than I can the direction I meant to take in my speech before the PEN vipers:

> Civil societies dedicated to the end of self-preservation cannot be expected to provide fertile soil for the heroic or the inspired. They do not require or encourage the noble...One who holds the 'economic' view of man cannot consistently believe in the dignity of man or in the special status of art and science.

These are the basics, the first principles of modernity, of the Enlightenment conviction that this is what would be best for most of us. The objectives of Lenin's revolution never materialized in Russia but they are all about us here in bourgeois America, says the philosopher Kojève. But in the process everything worth living for has melted away.

EASTERN EUROPE was "spared" our revolution. Instead Russia had seven decades and more of Stalin, an oriental despot; and Poland, Hungary and the rest came in for nearly half a century of Soviet rule. The writers who stood their ground against totalitarianism, and went to the Lubyanka and the Gulag, move us deeply as moralists and artists. I particularly admire Shalamov, the author of *Kolyma Tales*, and Aleksander Wat who wrote *My Century*, together with many others, Russians, Poles and Jews who endured Stalin's prisons and Hitler's death camps.

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In the West, people excused from such torments are, I think it fair to say, inclined to mix self-reproach with their admiration. They wonder how they would have fared under pressure. Terror is the test of tests, and I suspect that the Hobbesian or the Darwinian states of nature challenge many of us imaginatively. Intellectuals are particularly susceptible to such challenges and possibly speculate whether living through such ordeals might not have healed their divided souls.

It comes back to me now that Lenin loved Jack London's stories of the Yukon. His favorite, "To Build a Fire," is about a man stopping for the night in vast snowfields and finding that he has only a single match left. He will freeze to death if it fails to light. I can remember when I was a boy holding my breath as I read the story. Jack London, I later discovered, had a great following in Eastern Europe. This turning back to what precedes civilization is common also among refined people, as is an admiration for elemental men, men capable of exceptional violence. Dostoevsky, for instance, was greatly impressed by the criminals he came to know in Siberia. One murderer said to him, "You are very innocent, so innocent that it's pitiful...Whether it was that he looked on me as somebody immature, not fully grown up, or whether he felt for me that sympathy which every strong creature feels for a weaker I do not know...even in the act of stealing from me he was sorry for me."

Do I seem here to be making a case against the intellectuals, criticizing even the way they read Solzhenitsyn or Shalamov? Well, yes—insofar as they allow tyranny to define the ground rules of existence. The tyrant tells us what true being is and how it should be judged. A scale of suffering is set up for us, with the camps at the top and Western societies at the bottom. Those who undergo the most dreadful torments are "serious," the rest of us are not worth bothering about.

My case against the intellectuals can be easily summarized: Science has postulated a nature with no soul in it; commerce does not deal in souls and higher aspirations—matters like love and beauty are none of its business; for his part, Marx too assigned art etcetera to the "superstructure." So, artists are "stuck" with what is left of the soul and its mysteries. Romantic enthusiasm (resistance to bourgeois existence) was largely discredited by the end of the Nineteenth Century. The Twentieth inverted Romanticism by substituting hate for love and nihilism for self-realization. Intellectuals seem to me to have turned away from those elements in life unaccounted for in modern science and which in modern experience have come to seem devoid of substance. The powers of soul, which were Shakespeare's subject (to be simple about it) and are heard incessantly in Handel or Mozart, have no footing at present in modern life and are held to be subjective. Writers here and there still stake their lives on the existence of these forces. About this, intellectuals have little or nothing to say.

We yield to these forces when we read a Shalamov or an Alexander Wat. We recognize them as coming directly from human nature, when that nature rejects the imposition of slavery and totalitarian injustice. But among ourselves, in the West, the forces are not acknowledged, they cannot even be recognized.

Here I have no choice but to go overboard. Russia's oriental despotism comes from the past, and the sympathies generated by those who fought for their lives against it have little to do, I suspect, with this present world of ours. Our American world is a prodigy. Here, on the material level, the perennial dreams of mankind have been realized. We have shown that the final conquest of scarcity may be at hand. Provision is made for human needs of every sort. In the U.S.—in the West—we live in a society which produces a fairy-tale superabundance of material things. Ancient fantasies have been made real. We can instantaneously see and hear what is far away. Our rockets are able to

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leave the earth. The flights we make are thoughts as well as real journeys. This is something new, and it is of a magnitude too vast to be grasped. To contemplate this can make us tremble for the humanity we miss in everything we see, in the incredible upwelling of inventions and commodities that carries us with it. We can't say whether this humanity has been temporarily diminished or has gone for good. Nor can we tell whether we are pioneers or experimental subjects. Russia is perhaps done with tyranny and privation. If it develops a free market and becomes a union of commercial republics, it will have to do as we have been doing all along. Kojève hints that we are irreversibly trivialized by our unexampled and bizarre achievements, so that neither life nor death can now be grasped. He seems to accept Nietzsche's appalling vision of the degenerate "Last Man."

I myself believe that everything that can be imagined is bound to be realized at least once—everything that mankind is capable of conceiving it seems compelled to do.

These, for better or for worse, are the thoughts the end of the Cold War suggests to me.□

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Did We Go Too Far?

Nathan Glazer

WITH LARGE PARTS of the former Soviet archives now available and open, with present and former high officials ready to tell their stories as readily as American officials seem to (and possibly for the same reasons and the same rewards), much that was formerly uncertain or that could only be guessed at in the history of the Cold War may become clearer. Many issues of specific concern to anticommunist intellectuals (because for decades they were engaged in trying to shape public opinion concerning them) may also become clearer.

For example, we already see a debate over the assertion by a high Russian intelligence official that there is nothing in the files that shows that Alger Hiss provided information as a spy for the Soviet Union. Few of us who were convinced from the beginning of the truth of Whittaker Chambers' story, and by the physical evidence he was able to provide to support it, will be persuaded to change our minds: It all fits in too well with our experience of Communists and communism. After all, Lionel Trilling had already told the basic elements of the story in his convincing novel *The End of the Journey*, published before Chambers came forth with his revelations. That, of course, had been very persuasive to intellectuals, who don't have to bother with the nuances that mean guilt or innocence under judicial rules, but who ask themselves: Does the story hang together?

On a second major espionage case on which intellectuals took sides, the first account from the Soviet Union also comes up blank. As I write, leading Russian nuclear weapons experts have reported that the first Soviet nuclear bomb was based on the American model, and used the information on its construction that the physicist-spy Klaus Fuchs provided. There is nothing in the news report on the Rosenbergs. But those who followed that case would not have expected anything major. We always knew that the information the Rosenbergs could supply, coming from Ethel Rosenberg's brother, a machinist, could play at best only a modest supporting role in revealing to the Soviet Union the characteristics of the bomb. The last major book on this subject, *The Rosenberg Case: A Search for the Truth*, by Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), should be convincing to any fair-minded reader on the question of their guilt.

I was recruited, if I may use the term, by Sidney Hook in 1956 to make a thorough examination of the Rosenberg case, to counteract the enormous anti-American campaign then under way in Europe to paint the Rosenberg trial as fraudulent. The Rosenbergs had already been executed, but Morton Sobell was still in jail, and the cam-

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paign was remarkably successful in recruiting big names. Bertrand Russell, an honorary founding member of the international organization of anticommunist intellectuals, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, was prevailed upon to write that the FBI was guilty of "atrocities whose techniques have been made familiar in other police states such as Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia." I think more will come out on the Rosenberg case—more already has, through the research of an energetic Soviet émigré scholar, Mark Kuchment, who has tracked down in Russia those American scientists whose names figured mysteriously in the case, but who were successful in escaping to the Soviet Union along the route that the Rosenbergs and Sobell tried in vain to take.

The Hiss and Rosenberg cases were only two controversies of many in which anticommunist intellectuals were engaged, in a cultural struggle that paralleled the diplomatic and military aspects of the Cold War.

In effect, we were defending the decency of the United States as a worthy protector of the values of liberty, freedom, truth, justice, against an enemy we defined as the very antithesis of these values. Another, and perhaps the most extensive, of these battles was over the treatment of communists and communist sympathizers in American colleges and universities. All these conflicts among intellectuals were of course side-shows to the real Cold War, whose major objective was limiting the expansion of the Soviet Union and communism, while avoiding a world nuclear holocaust, and yet they were related. Fighting the Cold War also meant fighting a campaign over American public opinion, not only the opinion of intellectuals, however defined—writers, scholars, thinkers, artists, performers, academics—but the opinions of larger circles who in various ways are influenced by those who make their living manipulating words and symbols and ideas. The struggle over such issues as Alger Hiss's guilt or innocence, the guilt and punishment of the Rosenbergs, the rights of faculty members who took the Fifth Amendment, was not divorced from the larger issues of the Cold War. Some of the faculty members called up before Congressional investigating committees and faculty and other university disciplinary bodies were themselves scientists who had worked on the atom bomb and thus their connection with life-and-death issues of the Cold War was immediate. The legitimacy and justice of searching out political opinions and actions, of the varying sanctions and punishments meted out to the people accused—reaching to death in the case of the Rosenbergs—could only be evaluated or judged on the basis of some estimate of the kind of threat communists, communism, and the Soviet Union posed to freedom and justice generally. And how we rated the quality of our justice, our freedom, our institutions, depended to some extent on the question of whether the differences between us and them were great enough to justify the intensity of the campaign against communist and pro-communist intellectuals.

These campaigns now all seem a matter of long ago and far away; by the late 1960s, communists, and persons directly influenced by them to serve the interests of the Soviet Union as they were transmitted to Communist Parties, had been quite thoroughly routed from American public life and any positions of influence. Despite the celebrity status of an Angela Davis, the hostility of student radicals toward American society and policy in the 1960s and the 1970s, had little to do with communism. Nineteen-sixties radicalism was quite a different matter, with quite different sources, even if it kept on finding in one communist state after another (Yugoslavia, Cuba, China) an ideal society that should be defended and should guide our own social efforts here in the United States. The American conflict over our war in Vietnam did not pit communists and communist sympathizers against anticommunists: Whatever the FBI might have thought, few communists were involved or played any role in that battle.

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And yet the issues of those earlier campaigns were still alive: How did one judge communist states? How did one judge the United States? Anticommunist intellectuals had helped form the picture of a great struggle between good and evil. Modifying or muddying the picture of the good here or the evil there would have consequences. That picture had been created because we believed it, and it played a key role in the question of what actions were justified, both in individual cases like those of Hiss and the Rosenbergs, and on larger and more significant policy issues too, such as our involvement in Vietnam and how forthcoming we should be in our negotiations with Soviet Russia. The large and small issues were all to some extent of a piece. The difference between them and us, the threat they posed to us, all justified the intensity of our response to their intellectual sympathizers at home, which was after all the main front on which anticommunist intellectuals, as intellectuals, could be effective.

We did try—or most of us did—to distance ourselves from the most intense anticommunists: yet we also ended up pretty much in the same camp as they. The Rosenberg case speaks to me with particular poignancy. Our experience of communists and the communist milieu, and of course the trial record itself, convinced us of their guilt. Some of us were uneasy over the death sentence, which seemed to be reaching far, on the basis of a questionably relevant statute. There was the question of equity—Klaus Fuchs went free after serving his term. Yet, since the Rosenbergs were defended so vigorously by communists and by those they duped on the basis of lies and falsehoods, it seemed necessary for us first to fight the lies and falsehoods that insisted on their innocence and the corruption of American judicial procedures, rather than to weigh judiciously whether we had responded proportionately—and I use "we" to refer to both the American people and institutions in general, and to anticommunist intellectuals in particular—to the crimes of which they were accused and convicted. To use a term that will certainly raise the hackles on an anticommunist intellectual: were we responding "hysterically"? Or were we insufficiently vigilant against the hysteria of others?

A few years ago, I had occasion to review current American history textbooks used in high schools, and was chagrined to discover that on these issues we (the anticommunist intellectuals) had been implicitly condemned. The textbooks spoke of McCarthyite anticommunist "hysteria." They generally agreed we had gone too far. My chagrin was based on the fact that we knew there were real communists, in colleges and universities, and in government service. We knew that at the extremes some were spies, and short of that many were engaged in subverting the institutions in which they worked, minor as their effects might be—bringing in their friends and keeping out anticommunists, influencing the tone of government agencies and academia, and even affecting, for God's sake, Hollywood movies.

To recall one of Irving Kristol's most famous (or notorious) lines, the one thing the American people knew about Joe McCarthy was that he, like them, knew there were real communists—the American people were not so sure about his liberal opponents. Actually, in presenting the American people as supporters of Joe McCarthy, I am being somewhat unfair. When, with President Eisenhower's belated support, McCarthy was brought down, the American people approved: he had been found guilty, despite the common knowledge he shared with them that communists and communism were real, on the issue of proportionality.

American anticommunist intellectuals did not spend much time on proportionality. We were so busy arguing the facts, which I suppose is the first duty of intellectuals, that we neglected to consider what weight we should put on the facts once established. Our job was to demolish the bad reasoning and lies that defended Alger Hiss and the

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Rosenbergs and the American communist professors. Communist Russia was certainly evil—though after Stalin somewhat less evil—and its supporters were supporting evil, and those who argued their civil rights had been breached in effect mitigated their culpability in supporting evil. So they also had to be contested and demolished...and this intellectual task was so demanding that we spent little or no effort on the question of what exactly should be done to these people, as we worked our way down the line of supporters, and supporters of supporters, and so on. What were we to make of it? What should we do about it?

Despite his enormous and positive role on the issue in general, I conclude reluctantly that on this point even Sidney Hook was wrong: yes, communists were bound to do thus, and this applied to communist professors as it did to other Party members; yes, commitment to their academic responsibilities demanded they not take the Fifth Amendment, and the fact that they did showed they were following the communist line or orders—and so the argument went, very effectively, from step to step. But in the end, there was little harm in communist professors of literature, not much more in communist professors of social science, and communist professors of physics and mathematics, if they were not engaged in passing secrets to the Soviet Union, were perhaps least harmful of all. There was a failure in applying a test of proportionality. I wonder how many of us were embarrassed at reading of the death of the distinguished classicist (with Marxist inclinations, to be sure) Sir Moses Finley, incapable of finding a job in the United States in the 1950s. True, he ended up at Cambridge University, so it did no harm to him in the end that Rutgers could not keep him and Cornell could not take him. But what does his story tell us about ourselves?

It was perhaps the first task of the anticommunist intellectuals to demonstrate that the Rosenberg trial was fair, that they were guilty, and to worry less about the savage punishment meted out to them. We were so busy fighting the anti-anticommunism of American intellectuals, we did not worry much about the extreme passions which could be whipped up, the excessive response that could be demanded from American institutions.

In this we were acting as a microcosm of American society, rather than as a corrective to it. I have been struck by a recent comment by Michael Howard in a review of a group of books in the *Times Literary Supplement* (January 8) on the Cold War. His concern is, of course, as a military strategist and historian, with the real Cold War, the one that could have killed us all. As we know, the United States won. "But," he writes,

> ...at what a cost! Was it really necessary for the West to arm itself to the teeth and indoctrinate two generations in a spirit of Manichaean hostility towards such a bumbling and inefficient adversary? Were there no opportunities...to de-escalate the conflict? Was is truly necessary, as Senator Vandenberg believed in 1948 and Paul Nitze in the 1950s, to 'scare all hell out of the American people' to mobilize them so as to sustain their part in a necessary long-term balance of power? Above all, was it necessary to trample down and manipulate the emerging nations of the Third World in maintaining that balance?

Howard raises questions that of course far transcend the role and position of anticommunist intellectuals. American foreign policy, from Eisenhower to Bush, John Foster Dulles to George Schultz, was scarcely dependent on the support of American intellectuals, and indeed, depending on how we define "intellectuals," most of them were generally, to one degree or another, in opposition. But I am speaking of the anticommunist intellectuals, who may be conveniently defined as those who once adhered to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and saw as one of their main tasks to tell the truth about

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the Soviet Union and communism. They were also called, by their enemies, "Cold War intellectuals." As the Cold War progressed, telling the truth about communism, the Soviet Union, other communist states, understanding the issues in the military posture of the West and the communist world, required more and more specialist knowledge, which few of the anticommunist intellectuals possessed. Their specialist knowledge, if it existed, was of Marxism and its modifications and deviations, and of early disputes among Marxists, socialists, communists, all of which became less and less relevant as the communist states moved ever farther away from Marxism and socialism in any classic sense. Anti-Marxist intellectuals could only applaud the work of those who were really able to follow what was going on, and who agreed with their preconceptions. Their specialty became dealing with pro-communist or insufficiently anticommunist intellectuals in the West, combat with whom required a knowledge of the broad repressive features of communist states.

Even though we could not play any significant role in dealing with the military and diplomatic and Third World aspects of the Cold War, we knew where our hearts lay, and our efforts—in form and style and temperament—were very similar to the efforts of our leaders, who had the rather more serious work of managing the Cold War and trying to prevent it from graduating into a hot war with unimaginable consequences. But, recognizing that difference, I focus here on the similarity in form, style, temperament. If, as Michael Howard suggests, there was some defect in American leaders, perhaps all the way from Truman to Bush, from Dulles to Kissinger, what was it? And how does it link up with the lesser battles that anticommunist intellectuals were waging in the court of public opinion? It seems to me that the common element was a refusal to be sufficiently sensitive to variation: to variations in Soviet policy, in Soviet leaders, in the degree of attachment of communist and pro-communist (or pro-Soviet) states to Marxism or communism or the Soviet Union. We drew the lines too sharply, and possibilities for partial agreements and arrangements were neglected. One can of course bring up all the cases in which it seems no such arrangement was possible—certainly Korea, very likely Vietnam. But that having been said, was there not something too Manichaean in our treatment of communism? Did we not make it all too much of a piece?

We all have our moments of surprise, in which things we take as fixed and settled become unsettled. I recall being shaken by a footnote in Arthur Schlesinger's biography of Robert Kennedy on the efforts of the attorney general (and one assumes subsequent administrations) to kill Castro. Not only were the schemes under consideration ridiculous, but the fact that our government leaders at the highest level approved of or called for them was something I had never considered possible.

I have mentioned my early involvement in the Rosenberg case. Subsequently, I followed it closely over the years, reviewing books that came out on it, and articles based on new material, and they too emerged in time with revelations that made me uneasy—not in my steady support of the verdict of guilty, but in the way our government treated the Rosenbergs after they were convicted. The details would take us too far afield. But by 1983, when I wrote a piece, "The Death of the Rosenbergs," for a *festschrift* in honor of Sidney Hook, I thought it only proper to deal with this new material. It seemed clear to me from the materials that had been released that the threat of death was used as a weapon to extract more information from the Rosenbergs. Judge Kaufman alone was responsible for imposing the death penalty, but it was then used to extract information. FBI agents were standing by at the scene of execution to interrogate the Rosenbergs and the United States Marshal had authority to stop the executions. This grotesque scene does not comport with the view I would like

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to have of my country and its leaders. The death sentence, I said in that article, is imposed as punishment and deterrent; it cannot be used to force confession and information. To use it so reminds one of the behavior of terrorists who hold hostages. There were other examples over the years of behavior that reduce one's faith in our government and our institutions.

And there were surprises on larger issues. Perhaps I should not have found it so startling, had I known more, to discover in Don Oberdorfer's *The Turn* that President Reagan was rather more eager to respond to and deal with Soviet leaders, and took their professions of a great desire to avoid war and reduce the tension between us more seriously, than did his chief advisors. President Reagan was the author of the phrase, "the evil empire." Yet when the leaders of that empire wrote to him to express their hopes for peace, he was willing to respond, was more forthcoming than his diplomatic and military advisors—and more forthcoming than anticommunist intellectuals, who applauded his characterization of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." They were harder, more suspicious, more unbending in their attitude to the Soviet Union than even the president they supported, a president who was closer to them in his view of communism and the Soviet Union than any other. He recognized that there could be a common interest in avoiding a universal catastrophe. Anticommunist intellectuals, trained by their long opposition to illusion, softness, and naivete, found this harder to believe.

It was not only anticommunist intellectuals who could not foresee the total collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union—hardly anyone could. No fault there. But again and again we were slow to recognize change, even if glacial and crescive. Yes, there was a dispute between the USSR and Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavia, despite its Communist Party rule, was not the same as the Soviet Union. Khrushchev was not Stalin. The conflict between the USSR and China was real. China was no friend of North Vietnam. And so on and so on. The complexities of different countries, histories and traditions, varied interests, could not usefully be summed up in the stark challenge: Are you with us or against us? Too often anticommunist intellectuals used this as the only test, swamping distinctions that were meaningful and significant and that gave a different picture of the world. This of course is just what intellectuals should not do. Of course the category "anticommunist intellectual" is too large, too imprecise, too vague, and our new and more adequate history of the role of intellectuals in the Cold War will have to take into account important distinctions among them, on all kinds of issues. Yet for many in that category, a various and complex world became reduced to "us" and "them," faults on one side were given insufficient weight, and human impulses on the other side too little credited. □

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My Cold War

Irving Kristol

THIS PAST FALL, in what used to be East Berlin, I attended a commemorative conference on "The Cold War and After." It was sponsored by the late, lamented *Encounter* magazine, which had been founded in London in 1953 by Stephen Spencer and myself, and which ceased publication last year. Though I left the magazine at the end of 1958, to return to New York, I have always felt a special sense of solidarity with it.

Encounter was accused of being a "Cold War" magazine, which in a sense was true enough. It was published by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, which was later revealed to be financed by the CIA. As a cultural-political journal, it published many fine literary essays, literary criticism, art criticism, short stories, and poetry, and in sheer bulk they probably preponderated. But there is no doubt its ideological core—its "mission," as it were—was to counteract, insofar as it was possible, the anti-American, pro-Soviet views of a large segment of the intellectual elites in the Western democracies and in the English-speaking Commonwealth.

Just how large this segment was, and how influential, is now easily (and conveniently) forgotten. In France, it was practically impossible to work in the film industry unless you were a member of the Communist Party or a reliable fellow-traveler. In Italy, it was not very different. In Germany, the dominant posture of intellectuals was "neutralist"—i.e., asserting a "moral equivalence" between the United States and the USSR. Even in Britain and the United States, majority opinion in the intellectual elite was, when not fellow-travelling or "neutralist," insistent on distancing itself from America's Cold War policies as overly "militaristic."

This intellectual *Weltanschauung* derived from the fact that most intellectuals, everywhere, were generally on the Left of the political spectrum. It was therefore easier to give the benefit of all doubts to the Soviet Union or, say, Cuba which were nominally "socialist" and ideologically egalitarian than to a vigorously capitalist United States. Only among the so-called "right-wing Social Democrats" did one find a consistent "anti-communist" attitude—which was never, however, a simple pro-American one, for obvious reasons.

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that the political coloration of *Encounter* was, on the whole, right-wing Social Democratic—something which annoyed those of my American friends who felt that an unqualified pro-American position was incumbent on us. Though by this time I had become skeptical of Social Democrats or "liberals" in the American sense—they came to the same thing—I appreciated the clear strategic desirability (perhaps even necessity) of such an orientation. But I was less than enthusiastic about it and took some satisfaction in publishing a

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few articles by some of the younger, more gifted British Tories.

The truth is that, by the time I came to *Encounter*, anticommunism or anti-Marxism or anti-Marxist-Leninism or anti-totalitarianism had pretty much ceased to interest me as an intellectual project. As a young Trotskyist in my college days, I had studied Marx and Lenin and Trotsky to the point of disillusionment. It was a useful inoculation that rendered me, not only immune, but positively indifferent to the ideological chatter around me. For almost half-a-century now, I have found it close to impossible even to read any apologia for a communist regime, any political analysis written from a pro-communist point of view, or any socio-economic analysis written from a Marxist or quasi-Marxist point of view. Only rarely did I feel moved to refute such writings. I was happy, for the most part, to leave that to others—scholars, journalists, publicists—being content to associate myself with their efforts to do God's work. I heartily approved of their Cold War but it was not my cold war.

My disillusionment with the Trotskyist version of radical socialism proceeded along its own path. I have never felt myself to be an "ex-Trotskyist" in the sense that some people conceive of themselves as "ex-communists." The experience was never that important to me, and my rightward drift commenced promptly upon its termination. I then defined myself as a "democratic socialist," though this was a movement so intellectually placid and politically inert that I am convinced I always understood it to be a convenient transitional phase.

In any case, my tepid loyalty to "democratic socialism" did not survive my experiences as an infantryman in the army. I entered military service with a prefabricated set of attitudes: The army was an authoritarian, hierarchical, mean-spirited, mindless machine—as later described by Norman Mailer in *The Naked and the Dead*—while the common soldiers, for all their human imperfections, represented the potential for a better future. Well, it turned out that, as a provincial from New York, I knew nothing about the American common man and even less about the army as an institution. Again and again, and to my surprise, I found reasons to think better of the army and less well of my fellow enlisted men. It is true that, since I was inducted in Chicago, my regiment was heavily populated by thugs or near-thugs from places like Cicero (Al Capone's old base), so my impressions may have been extreme. Nevertheless, my army experience permitted me to make an important political discovery: The idea of building socialism with the common man who actually existed—as distinct from his idealized version—was sheer fantasy, and therefore the prospects for "democratic socialism" were nil. The army may have radicalized Norman Mailer; it successfully de-radicalized me. It caused me to cease being a socialist.

BUT WHAT was I, then? When, after the war, I joined the editorial staff of *Commentary*, I accepted, for want of a better term, the designation of "liberal." After all, members of the New York intellectual community were *all* "liberals," with not a conservative (not one!) among them. It didn't matter that much to me because, in the immediate post-war years, I wasn't particularly interested in politics. My own writings, in that period, encompassed religion, philosophy, and literature. I was a member in good standing of the anticommunist segment of that intellectual community—*Commentary*, after all, was one of its major organs—but I do not recall writing anything about communism. It was a period—it lasted almost five years—during which, as a liberal editor, non-liberal thoughts germinated in my mind and soul. I was far from being a conservative, had no interest in "market economics," and the notion of voting Republican was as foreign to me as attending a Catholic mass. I suppose that, in today's terms, I could be fairly described as a premature "neo-liberal"—with

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the emphasis most emphatically on the "neo."

The two intellectual godfathers of my neo-ism were Lionel Trilling and Reinhold Niebuhr. It was Trilling who, as early as my college years, and even while I was a Trotskyist, pointed to liberalism's dirty little secret—that there was something basically rotten about its progressive metaphysics that led to an impoverishment of the imagination and a dessication of the spirit. It was he who pointed out that among all the modern novelists and poets we admired, and which he taught in his Columbia University course, there was not one who could properly be called a liberal. This theme Trilling went on to develop and deepen in the decades that followed, and I greedily seized upon every word he wrote. Oddly enough, he never ceased to think of himself as a liberal, albeit a disturbed and dissident liberal, and while always respectful of religion, he was irredeemably secular in his sensibility. His mission as he saw it, apparently, was to liberate liberals from the confines of liberalism. But toward what, he could never say.

Reinhold Niebuhr could say. His two-volume *Nature and Destiny of Man* was the first theological work I had ever read and it pointed me beyond liberalism. To be sure, I had always had a vague, positive feeling about religion and was especially fond of religious poets (Donne, Hopkins, Eliot). Indeed, it may have been through poetry that my predisposition to religion was formed. But I had neither the intellectual vocabulary nor the intellectual grammar with which to *think* about religion. It was Niebuhr who introduced me to the idea of "the human condition" as something permanent, inevitable, trans-cultural, trans-historical, a transcendent finitude. To entertain seriously such a vision is already to have disengaged oneself from a crucial progressive-liberal piety. It also enables one to read the Book of Genesis with an appreciation that approaches awe. After Niebuhr, I plunged into theological literature with an ecumenical enthusiasm. By the late 1940s, religious thought was my most passionate interest—though, in the secular-liberal milieu in which I lived and worked, it was an interest to be revealed with prudence. The fact that Niebuhr, like Trilling, was generally regarded—and regarded himself to be—a member in good standing of the liberal intellectual community was reassuring to me. Perhaps it was possible, after all, to reject liberal metaphysics while remaining, to some degree and in some way, politically liberal. The following decades were to reveal to me how utterly impossible it was.

It was in 1951 that I started writing about politics again, if only intermittently. My first such effort was a book review of a prominent fellow-travelling liberal, in which I tried to analyze the rhetoric of this kind of liberalism—not so much to argue with this rhetoric as to demonstrate how it shaped an utterly false view of the world. This was the beginning of my cold war—a persistent critical inquiry into liberalism, trying to figure out what were the passions and the intellectual preconceptions that moved otherwise intelligent people to take a relatively benign view of communist tyranny in power and of communist movements that strove to establish such a tyranny. I was grappling with the phenomenon of left-wing political romanticism and utopianism that infected the intellectual classes of the West, and of the Westernized elites in the "Third World."

I was indeed a "Cold Warrior" (a "Cold War liberal" was the familiar ascription) but I was not engaged in any kind of crusade against communism. It was the fundamental assumptions of contemporary liberalism that were my enemy. For without the moral legitimation of communism provided by Western intellectuals—all the Soviet intellectuals had perished or were in prison camps—the "Cold War" was reduced to a raw, power conflict between totalitarian tyranny and constitutional democracy. This Cold War was a very serious business, as war always is. And there was certainly a crucial ideological dimension

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to the conflict. The Soviet rulers were authentic Marxist-Leninists, though the peoples they ruled were nothing of the sort. But there really was no good reason why the bizarre beliefs of communist leaders should have provoked ideological turmoil in the West, should have given rise to the notion that there were agonizing choices to be made. It was only the prevailing liberal ethos among intellectuals, academia, and the media that imported this complication into our lives.

In the decades that followed, this ethos moved consistently leftward as I moved consistently rightward. My liberal credentials became tattered, in my own eyes as well as in the eyes of others. Eventually, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, something that was to be called "neo-conservatism" came into being as a new category of political identity for persons like myself. I found it a relief to be so designated and to be removed from that narrowing portion of the political spectrum labelled as "anticommunist liberal."

ANTICOMMUNISM had long since ceased being an interesting intellectual issue for me. Resistance to the imperialist designs of communist totalitarianism was essential, of course. How to make such resistance maximally effective was a political challenge, as was resistance to the ever-mounting passion for appeasement evident in liberal circles. But what began to concern me more and more were the clear signs of rot and decadence germinating within American society—a rot and decadence that was no longer the consequence of liberalism but was the actual agenda of contemporary liberalism. And the more contemporary, the more candid and radical was this agenda.

For me, then, "neo-conservatism" was an experience of moral, intellectual, and spiritual liberation. I no longer had to pretend to believe—what in my heart I could no longer believe—that liberals were wrong because they subscribe to this or that erroneous opinion on this or that topic. No—liberals were wrong, liberals are wrong, because they are liberals. What is wrong with liberalism is liberalism—a metaphysics and a mythology that is woefully blind to human and political reality. Becoming a neo-conservative, then, was the high point of *my* cold war.

It is a cold war that, for the last twenty-five years, has engaged my attention and energy, and continues to do so. There is no "after the Cold War" for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other. It cannot win, but it can make us all losers. We have, I do believe, reached a critical turning point in the history of the American democracy. Now that the other "Cold War" is over, the real cold war has begun. We are far less prepared for this cold war, far more vulnerable to our enemy, than was the case with our victorious war against a global communist threat. We are, I sometimes feel, starting from ground zero, and it is a conflict I shall be passing on to my children and grandchildren. But it is a far more interesting cold war—intellectually interesting, spiritually interesting—than the war we have so recently won, and I rather envy those young enough for the opportunities they will have to participate in it. □

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